

Between Two Ears

BY BARBARA KELLEY

Hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive technology help tremendously. But if hearing loss only affected *hearing*, and was just something clinically diagnosed and charted on an audiogram, treating hearing loss would be easy. While we've seen advances in technology and more attention paid to hearing health as part of overall health, one thing hasn't changed—the emotional toll that hearing loss takes on a person and those around us.

Hearing loss can be insidious, chipping away at the hearing you have, zapping energy and eroding confidence and the will to stay engaged, especially with those we love. It may feel too exhausting to attend a gathering or event, or too difficult to follow the dinner conversation. You might get frustrated when you must keep reminding the person giving you a medical exam that you can't understand what is being said.

Human interactions thrive on conversation and when that breaks down, so do we. We start to wonder who we are in moments of self-doubt. Questions like, "Can I still do my job? Can I be a good parent?" lead to worst-case scenarios and catastrophizing.

You're not alone. Our Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) community knows these struggles all too well, and that's why our work to empower people to live better lives with hearing loss is so important.

A Better Path

There's science to substantiate feelings of loss, self-doubt, fear and more. Last year, our Research Symposium* at the HLAA Convention, "The Emotional Side of Hearing Loss," explored these powerful emotions, the ways they impact our behaviors and, on the positive side, how we can harness this insight into a better way of life. At the HLAA 2025 Convention in Indianapolis this June, the Research Symposium topic will be "Stigma: Making the Invisible Actionable."

In May, in conjunction with Better Hearing Month and Mental Health Awareness Month, we will launch a campaign to shine the light on the emotional side of hearing loss by bringing information, resources and hope to those who need support beyond what technology offers. We want everyone to recognize that hearing health is an important part of overall well-being and give people all the tools they need to thrive.

Most people reading this have already taken steps to try technology—hearing aids, cochlear implants and more—but it doesn't stop there. Others have yet to even take that first step, maybe because they are caught in the emotional grip of not knowing what to do. Our work is never done as long as people need support and solid information.

HLAA offers choices to be with people where it's okay not to hear well: HLAA Chapters, Walk4Hearing, free captioned webinars, virtual meetings and an annual convention. Help yourself, then turn around and help someone else who might be struggling with hearing loss. There is something you can do, and your health and quality of life depend on it. Be sure to take care of the space between your ears. **HL**

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**There's a lot going
on between our ears.
Therein lies the brain
which connects to
the heart through the
nervous system—fertile
ground for emotions
to grow and erupt.**

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