

# Optimizing Outcomes with a Cochlear Implant: Tips for Adults

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**C**ochlear implants (CIs) function differently than a hearing aid by bringing the sound to the brain through new pathways, allowing recipients to hear speech and environmental sounds more clearly than they could hear with hearing aids. Assistance may be needed to achieve meaningful listening from the new signal. Through optimizing programming and building listening skills, a recipient can maximize their outcomes.

## OPTIMIZING PROGRAMMING

Work closely with your audiologist to discuss programming solutions for your CI. An open, honest relationship helps the audiologist refine the program (or map) to improve outcomes by improving listening in noise, at meetings, or in other situations. The audiologist may suggest assistive listening devices to promote better hearing at home, work, and in the community, including devices that connect the CI to sound sources such as a computer or tablet, TV, sound system in theaters or other venues, or the telephone. CI manufacturers have staff dedicated to helping recipients make optimal use of their CI and devices.

## BUILDING LISTENING SKILLS

Appropriate programming optimizes listening, but some challenges benefit from strengthening listening skills. Aural rehabilitation is listening and communication therapy that can help and may accelerate the process. Aural rehabilitation is necessary, similar to receiving physical therapy after knee surgery. A professional, often an audiologist or speech-language pathologist, can help determine strengths and challenges in listening and guide a recipient's practice plan by identifying how and what to practice. CI centers can provide information about accessing aural rehabilitation services. Services are often covered by health insurance and may be provided in-person or via telehealth.

## TIPS FOR BUILDING LISTENING SKILLS

Common listening situations that are challenging for many people with CIs can improve with practice. In addition to wearing the CI whenever awake and having daily conversations with others, there are tips and exercises for building listening skills during early timeframes after activation of the CI.



**Ms. Sorkin**, left, is the executive director of the American Cochlear Implant Alliance, helping to expand awareness of and access to CIs. **Ms. Zombek** provides aural rehabilitation services for children and adults at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center.

## LISTENING TO CONVERSATIONS

- Characterize words said by a listening partner as long or short (one- vs. three-syllable words; two vs. three syllables).
- Listen for words in a category and tell what word is heard (colors, pets, pizza toppings).
- Listen to videos or TV with closed captioning on and read and listen along.
- Repeat a sentence or paragraph from a book or magazine read by a listening partner.
- As you improve, make it harder (listen without captions).

## LISTENING IN NOISE


- Improve the listening environment by getting close to the most important speaker, turning off extra noise sources when possible, and using CI settings and accessories that help bring the speaker's voice into the CI.
- Repeat the Listening to Conversations exercises and add some noise (music, TV) in the background, increasing the volume to increase the challenge.

## MUSIC APPRECIATION

- Listen to multiple genres of music that you enjoy. Music with fewer instruments and a strong beat may sound the best.
- Listen to individual instruments first (search instrumental solos on the internet). Focus on instruments found in preferred music genres (e.g., rock music has guitar, bass guitar, drums, and keyboard).
- Read lyrics while listening along to the song.
- If possible, choose music that you may be familiar with before your hearing declined.

## LISTENING ON THE TELEPHONE

- Explore various components of telephone listening that can help make a phone call via a CI, including settings on the processor, connecting to the telephone (via telecoil or Bluetooth), and selecting a phone that works well.
- Try a louder (or softer) program for the phone.
- Practice in a "safe" context with someone who is easy to understand and who is speaking a little slower than usual.
- Know that some speakers may always be difficult to understand (i.e., those with heavily accented speech).

For more tips and exercises, visit <https://www.acialliance.org/page/AdultRehab>. 



The Hearing Journal is proud to announce a partnership with the American Cochlear Implant Alliance to provide patient handouts.