

Music tips for adults





The development of cochlear implants (CIs) over the past 30 or so years, has meant that many people with profound hearing loss are now able to understand speech with relative ease. The majority of adults with CIs are able to communicate easily and effectively one-on-one, in small groups, and even on the phone. Most adult CI users report that speech sounds clear and natural to them, but there is a remaining area of concern for many: music just doesn't sound as good as they remember it.

This flyer is designed to help you, the CI user, to once again start to enjoy listening to music. There is no magic formula, or even a hard and fast set of rules to follow, but there are some tips that should help you have better access to music.

Start with the familiar

Can you think of a song that you know very well? A song that is so familiar, you can "hear it in your head," if you stop and concentrate? Quite often such songs are from our teenage years, when we had the ability to very easily remember the words and tunes of many songs.

The next step is to find a recording of that particular song. If you don't have a copy but do have access to the Internet, you can go to YouTube™ (www.youtube.com) and see if it's there. Alternatively, you might be able to find a copy at your local library.

Sit down in a quiet place and listen to your chosen song a few times. How does it sound? Is it how you remember it? Perhaps even more importantly, do you like it? You might try to experiment with the volume to see if that has any effect on the sound quality. Remember that your music listening experience will probably improve with practice. A little perseverance at first can have long-term benefits.

If you have any difficulty following the lyrics, try to get a copy of them. Sometimes our memory of the lyrics of a particular song is not quite as accurate as we thought! The Internet is a good source for lyrics. Type the name of the song, or even a couple of lines into Google™ (www.google.com) or some other search engine and see if that provides you with access to the full lyrics.



Keep it Simple

At first, try to limit your choices to pieces of music that have fairly simple arrangements and a single, clear, well-defined voice. Many CI users, for example, report that the early songs of Johnny Cash, such as "I Walk the Line" and "Ring of Fire" sound very natural and are easy to follow. The characteristics of these songs that may make them suitable for early listening with a CI include: a limited number of instruments (quite often only guitar and percussion), a clearly defined rhythm, Cash's baritone voice, and a singing style which closely resembles speech.

If you prefer instrumental music, try to find familiar pieces that feature either a solo instrument or a small number of instruments. Again, YouTube is a good place to find these. Type in a simple description of what you would like to hear – "piano solo," "piano and violin," "guitar solo," etc., – and see what's available. Are there any familiar pieces? Are there music styles that you like such as bluegrass, string bands, indie rock, etc? If so, type in that name and see what you get.

Playing favorites

You might like to see what clips YouTube has of your favorite performers. It doesn't matter whether it's Elvis Presley, Elvis Costello, or Duffy, you'll probably find them there.

Look at the range of available songs and choose the ones you like best. Some clips will include lyrics, which can be a big help in following the song.

Auditory-visual

One of the great advantages of YouTube material is that it offers the opportunity to not only hear music, but to see it being played as well. We know that vision (speechreading) is important in speech understanding, and it can also help provide better access to music. Being able to see a singer's lips move makes it easier to follow the song, and that, in turn, makes the listening situation a little easier. Similarly, watching a pianist's hands on the keyboard can also support listeners by providing cues that allow better access to the music.

Listening environment

Stop and ask yourself the following question, "When is speech easiest to understand?" The answer for the vast majority of CI users is, "in a quiet, non-reverberant listening environment." The same situation applies for music. You'll have the best opportunity to enjoy musical listening if you avoid rooms with background noise or too much reverberation.

Equipment

If you have access to it, good quality equipment provides the best listening experience. Don't go out and buy new equipment, however, before testing what you already have available. If the sound quality doesn't seem to be acceptable, ask a friend or family member with normal hearing for their opinion. How does it sound to them? If they think that the quality is unacceptable, try listening with some other equipment, or consider buying a better system. iPods, MP3 players, portable CD players, are all popular, and may be a good source for your music listening, using headphones positioned over the microphone(s) of your audio processor(s), or direct audio input.

If you are listening via your computer, be aware that the sound quality of built-in speakers is almost always quite poor. Make sure that you use a decent set of external speakers, plug in a set of headphones, or use direct audio input. Again, it's a good idea to have a family member or friend check the sound to make sure it's acceptable.

Playing an instrument

Have you ever played an instrument? If so, experiment with it, and see how it sounds with your CI. You don't have to be a professional to enjoy making music, and it may provide information that helps you become a better music listener. If you don't play an instrument, you can try tapping or clapping the beat of a song. If a family member or friend plays an instrument, see if they would play some simple tunes for you. If you know what's being played and can see it happening, that might help you to hear it better.



"I dont like that!"

Don't expect to like everything that you hear, especially when you first start listening to music more regularly. We all have musical likes and dislikes, and it's unreasonable to expect that everything will sound good. Find music that you like and listen to it, and then gradually expand your range of listening. It might take time, but it'll be worth the effort.

Practice, practice, practice!

Practice is the key to better music listening. The more you practice listening to music, the better it's going to sound. Perseverance and practice are the keys to better listening skills.

A couple of music resources!

"Noise Carriers" is a CD and DVD set presenting the performance of a piece written for cochlear implant users (based on current research) by the Scots composer Oliver Searle.

Contact your local MED-EL representative to obtain a copy. "Listening to music with a cochlear implant" Mark Ross has written a very interesting series of articles on his musical experiences following the fitting of a cochlear implant.

Parts 1 - 4 can be found at
www.hearinglossweb.com/tech/ci/music/ross.htm

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