

When a Stranger Sees Your Hearing Aid



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Do you know that when you wear your hearing devices, you are an advocate? And do you know that every time you're out in public, you have the potential to change the life of a stranger that day?

Regardless of your back story, you wear your hearing aid or cochlear implant sound processor because you have chosen to hear better. The technology is an essential component of your personal operating system and, once in place for the day, you hardly give them a thought.

But someone else might.

As you go about your business – shopping, walking, playing a sport, riding a subway – someone may notice that glint of silver behind your ear, or that almost-imperceptible plastic wire entering the pinna. They might startle at the brilliant red of your hearing aid or notice the creamy sound processor, unapologetically taking up real estate on the side of your head. For most people, these sights might barely register with a conscious thought, just as we may note the woman next to us handling the lettuce, or the man walking his dog wearing unseasonable shorts. But these things have no relevance to us, so our mind doesn't engage. It moves on.

But out there today may be a person who sees your device – and you have no way of knowing this – and becomes riveted. Physically they may keep moving, but their mind stays with you. Your device has sparked an emotional response to the argument they've been having with themselves, and the dialogue starts playing again in their head.

There's another one. That person is wearing a hearing aid for everyone to see. They're doing it and I'm not. Why aren't I? I know I have hearing loss. But – to wear that out in public? Actually, it looks fine. Well, maybe not fine, because I saw it, which means anyone can see it, but I know I'm almost looking for it. Heck, I look pretty good for my age, but a hearing aid will move me from the category of "Looks Fabulous for Her Age" to the "Older Person Who Uses Hearing Aids". But that woman looks pretty good too. Great coat, love her boots. And she's smiling! I should do this, shouldn't I? Dammit, if that woman can, I can too."

And you will also never know this: that person follows through and gets hearing aids. She wears them when shopping for lettuce, wearing yoga pants in winter. You helped make this happen. You might not consider yourself a hearing health advocate. Maybe you don't write blogs, give speeches, or write to your local government asking for more accessibility in public spaces. But in the very act of using assistive technology, you become a silent peer mentor and a witness to the importance of better communication, better health. You show that you care about yourself, that you're in control. You've demonstrated the willingness to reach out for help and to accept it.

This is you – and you may just be helping others, too.