Single-sided hearing and you

Introducing the Phonak CROS solution

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Welcome

If you've been diagnosed with single-sided hearing, let us reassure you of two things: it's entirely normal to feel overwhelmed; and help is at hand. Thanks to modern technology – and despite what you might have heard or read about hearing aids – effective solutions for single-sided hearing do exist. You do not have to live life only ever catching part of the conversation, nor do you necessarily have to have a hearing aid surgically fitted.

But before we get to solutions, meet Angie Aspinall – the award-winning entrepreneur who shares her inspiring story of living with single-sided hearing in this booklet. In Angie's words: "I'm not a medical professional or an audiologist; I'm just someone like you, who has hearing loss but perhaps unlike you, I've had a number of years to adjust. **I'm hoping that by sharing my experiences with you, I might be able to help you make some decisions about how you might wish to manage your hearing loss."**

Over the next several pages you'll get to know Angie's story well, and you'll undoubtedly identify with some of the feelings she describes: anger, fear, grief... but hopefully also excitement at the prospect of finding a solution that's right for you. **"When I was diagnosed with single-sided hearing, I was given no written information. I felt helpless. This guide includes information that I wish I'd been given at the time,"** adds Angie.

Angie Aspinall is an award-winning deafened entrepreneur, Accessibility Consultant and Director of Access Solutions Associates Ltd. She is also a journalist, blogger, event speaker and co-owner of Aspinall Ink.

Whether or not you feel ready to take the first step towards dealing with your single-sided hearing, this booklet is for you. Turn to it when you are ready, and whenever you need comfort, guidance or knowledge. After all, knowledge is power, and at Phonak, we are on a mission to help you reclaim your power and to reconnect you to the beauty of sound.

Angie's Story

Early signs of hearing loss

Angie's story starts with a visit to the doctor, after almost being knocked down by cars two days in a row because she hadn't heard them coming. Angie's doctor didn't seem too concerned about her apparent loss of hearing in one ear, thinking she probably just needed that ear syringed, but referred her to the local hospital for a hearing test.

Testing and diagnosis

It became apparent to Angie pretty quickly during her hearing test that something was wrong. Naturally, by the time Angie saw the ENT, she was feeling anxious, self-conscious and uncomfortable. According to the ENT, Angie had a hereditary condition called otosclerosis, which would get worse over time. He didn't say how deaf she would become and so, Angie assumed the worst. **"I saw only a future where I would end up being profoundly deaf, unable to hear anything at all and the thought absolutely terrified me. I think I went into shock,"** says Angie.

‘Getting by’

Angie's first experience of hearing loss came with the diagnosis of otosclerosis in one ear, and for a few years she got by with lipreading and positioning, making sure everyone was on her 'good' side. For most people who have never used a hearing aid, the thought of having to wear one is daunting, which is possibly why so many people take the 'getting by' approach to single-sided hearing.

For Angie, being fitted with a hearing aid at the time didn't help because it amplified all frequencies to an uncomfortable level. "It meant the hearing aid was of no use to me, as high-pitched sounds such as cutlery and crockery rattling around were simply 'deafening'," says Angie, **"I did what many people do: I put the hearing aid in a drawer."**

Many people with single-sided hearing may not feel like they need a hearing aid, and like Angie, will learn various coping strategies for their hearing loss. These are helpful tools, but they aren't going to allow you to fully participate in all listening situations and can become very tiring.

Single-sided hearing means you cannot pinpoint where sounds are coming from: everything seems to come from the one side. "Sometimes, in a group, by the time you've located who's speaking, they've stopped and someone else has started," says Angie. **"By then, you've missed what was said and can no longer follow the conversation."**

No longer ‘getting by’

Then, when Angie was 42 years old, she suffered what is known as Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss (SSHL). "Between waking one morning and lunchtime, I lost all the hearing in my better ear. It was gone completely and will never return," says Angie. "I went straight to the emergency department of my local hospital. I was told it was 'just an ear infection' but I knew it was more serious."

"When I saw a consultant, I was told that my sudden hearing loss may have been caused by a viral ear infection. I may never know for sure what caused it. For months I was left with just my old hearing aid. It alerted me to traffic sounds but it made voices barely audible: I had been relying on my good ear for years and now I was told it was dead. **It was an incredibly isolating and depressing time and the specialists talked about first a cochlear implant and then a bone anchored hearing aid (BAHA). I was at a loss, and reluctant to have surgery. It was a very scary time."**

A solution

Determined not to give up on finding non-surgical options, Angie carried out her own research on single-sided hearing and discovered the Phonak CROS.

Unlike BAHA which require surgery and an extended time for healing, once the CROS solution is fitted, you can simply switch it on and enjoy hearing from both sides.

CROS will transmit sound and voices to let your good ear hear for both your ears. If you have good hearing in one ear and no hearing in the other, then CROS will work for you.

CROS stands for 'Contralateral Routing of Signal' and consists of two parts:

- the CROS aid with a microphone to pick up sounds and voices from the non hearing ear and wirelessly transmit them to the hearing aid
- the hearing aid to receive the signal from the non hearing ear and play it to your good ear

Switching on

Angie didn't have high hopes for her 'switch on': "To be honest, my audiologist had told me it could take between six and twelve months to adjust to the CROS solution, and that I might not want to wear the aids all the time. How wrong he was! **As soon as the pair was switched on, I could hear him and reply. My brain remembered what it was to hear and it immediately – and blissfully – fell for the illusion of left/right sound.**" After a few tweaks of the settings, Angie left her audiologist's office ready to get on with her life.

"I've often said that my CROS gave me back my life," says Angie, "I left the audiologist's and marvelled at the 'click clack' noise the heels of my boots made on the pavement. What a truly amazing experience to hear something so trivial.

"As soon as I got home, I told my husband how amazing it was and how my brain seemed to 'get it' straight away. We went for a walk in our local wood and I marvelled at being able to hear the stream and the birds and my husband's voice – regardless of which side he was on as we walked. But the best part of all was being able to hear the 'squelch' my boots made in the mud. Even before my sudden hearing loss, I hadn't been able to pick up sounds like this, so it was a total revelation to me. I was so happy."

Ready to discover your own single-sided hearing solution?

Angie's CROS solution

Phonak hearing aid (real size)

Phonak CROS-312 (real size)

Visit www.phonak.com/cros to find out more about Phonak CROS, and to locate an audiologist in your area.

Life is on

We are sensitive to the needs of everyone who depends on our knowledge, ideas and care. And by creatively challenging the limits of technology, we develop innovations that help people hear, understand and experience more of life's rich soundscapes.

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