

Chris

My hearing story really starts in infancy, where toxins released by ear infections destroyed part of my high frequency hearing- it wasn't really a problem I went through school without a problem, I went through University without a problem. Until my late 30s I never thought of myself as having a hearing loss.

By my late 30s I found I was having trouble at cocktail parties, I moved to the fringes of the group so that I didn't have too many other conversations, competing conversations and I could focus on the one that I wanted to listen to much better there. By my early fifties, everything had got worse, I had tinnitus, I had my first hearing aid and the consultant explained to me that with my kind of age related hearing loss the little hair cells that send signals into the auditory nerve were progressively failing and the difficulty of that is that when they all fail, hearing aids no longer work - so at that point a cochlear implant became the only solution.

The impact that this was having was when I had social invitations, I found it difficult and eventually I tried to avoid them wherever possible, or else found some useful job that I could do: being a waiter, topping up drinks, but just trying not to go into difficult hearing situations.

In business I eventually reached a point where I couldn't use a telephone, I couldn't follow what was being said in a business meeting, and this really made me think very seriously about a cochlear implant. I looked into the future and what I saw was the situation where I would be an increasing burden on my family, I couldn't continue in business and for myself I couldn't enjoy social situations or many of the things that you need just for normal life.

There was an incident that happened in a supermarket where a woman barged past me and then turned round and said rather crossly, 'well I did say excuse me'. She didn't appreciate that at the time all I had a single hearing aid, no hearing in this ear, with a forward-facing microphone so I couldn't hear anything behind. That is typical of little incidents that happen when you can't hear properly.

This is interesting, and it may be important for people that are considering having cochlear implants in the future, because I do a certain amount of business, I had to assess what my income prospects would be if I had an implant compared with my income prospects without an implant. In my case I felt that the income prospects alone justified the implant, the improvement to family life and my own social life that

just came as a bonus but with hindsight the improvement has been so great that either one would have justified it in its own right.

Having done all that early training and we had moved on, I am now seven months post implant, the BKB test scores haven't particularly improved but what has improved is my hearing in noise, things like the incident in the supermarket that I described previously, they no longer happen. I can hear at a distance which I couldn't do previously, and I can have a conversation in the street much more easily than I could before. Well that is my story.