

Making the Choice/Making the Decision about Cochlear Implants

(Courtesy of CI Hear at Yahoo Groups.Com)

Thu Sep 1, 2016 12:27 am (PDT) . Posted by:

Many individuals who are considering a cochlear implant look for help in comparing the different types of implants. They go to various internet groups to find out which implant is best. Comparing or recommending is not the place of CI users. Sharing experiences with what the implant user knows and experiences is. Sharing websites that make comparisons only creates a false sense of what is true and what is not. Unfortunately, those sites are written by opinionated individuals who are biased toward a particular type of implant thus they are negative towards the others. Herein, we find the very essence of what we know as the brand wars. It's amazing that you only see this happen with cochlear implant users but this device brings such a degree of passion and loyalty to the users brand that they lose sight of the reality that all of the implants provide amazing sound that brings quality of life. The Cochlear Implant makes miracles happen.

So how does a 'new implant' investigator decide which implant is the one they should choose? The answers are very straight forward. **You will realize that these points are my opinion but they are based on over 8 years of activity on various lists and internet chat rooms.**

1. Each implant company provides a website with information which is relative to their particular brand. You can find them at the following:

<http://www.bionicear.com>

<http://www.cochlear.com>

<http://www.medel.com>

There you will find everything you want to know about these implants. They provide videos and CDs along with informational packets full of what you want to know. You can e mail/call them with your questions and concerns and they will be happy to respond. All of the instructions on how to do this are found on each individual site.

2. If you have reached the state of making this decision, you have likely been to a qualified CI Center where you have met with a surgeon and an audiologist. If you have not done this, that is your next step. Do not read on until you have done that. If you have, you need to trust these individuals who now have your hearing health in their hands. Go to them prepared to ask questions. Write down your concerns if you must and don't leave the office until they have answered every one of them. Most centers will not tell you which implant they feel is best, but they will tell you which implant they have more experience with and/or enjoy working with

3. The implant centers have dummy models of the implants for you to view and handle. Take these models and try them on. See how they feel. Is this comfortable or does it feel uncomfortable? Make sure

that the model has the weight of the batteries in it so that you can get a true feeling of what to expect. A cochlear implant is not normally uncomfortable - in fact they are far more comfortable in my opinion than any hearing aid. Still, having the opportunity to test their comfort level for you should be considered as you should be wearing this most of your waking hours once you are hooked up.

4. Ask the center to bring in individuals who have been implanted and who would be willing to talk to you about their implant story. Always keep in mind the majority of implant users are going to be very partial to their implant type because it has given them the gift of sound. If children are being considered for the implant - ask to speak to other parents and their implanted child. Talking to a child who has been implanted is a pure delight. It's important to weigh the length of time a user has had his or her implant as this can have a bearing on their hearing ability.

5. Often people go a far distance to be implanted in a particular CI center only to find out afterwards that there are no audiologists in the area where they live, who have the equipment or experience to program the device which they chose. They therefore are forced to travel further than they had expected and many times the inconvenience of that travel prohibits them from getting programmed as often as they really need it. This is a big consideration for many who are not fortunate enough to live near a large implant center.

6. Join and read messages on internet lists knowing that there is a tremendous loyalty to the company the user has chosen and this is very much deserved. Most of us have struggled with making the decision but once it was made, we are happy because the results are life altering in a positive way. Our quality of life is restored, which is a miracle. I cannot honestly tell you whether I would have done better with another type of implant. Since I am happy with mine, it's not important. Others cannot honestly tell you either. Only a very small percentage of implanted individuals are on these internet lists. Many more of them take on full lives that don't leave them time to be active on the internet. You may even find those who have had two implant types and have found that one worked better for them than another. This is not a normal occurrence and very few of them share this with groups such as ours. From what I've seen, the scores on this are quite even.

Not everyone is a star player with a cochlear implant. The goal is to do the best you can with what you have. Practice and perseverance are key words. Remembering what you don't have when the processor is off helps you to appreciate how much the processor gives you.

7. Cochlear implants are speech processors. That is the intent of the equipment. Since speech is the important element in life that we need for communications, it is and should be on the top of the list of things accomplished by your CI. Anything beyond that is just a blessing to you and for you to enjoy. The sound is not normal. It is not normal hearing. It is stimulated thru a series of electrodes that generate energy to the auditory nerve which feeds the brain with electronic sound. Over time, this electronic sound becomes more and more normal as you use it daily for your listening needs. Eventually, people sound much like you remember and this is very enjoyable. Always keep in mind that understanding what is being said is the most important feature and remembering that is extremely important - no matter how the sound comes to you.

8. Everyone is different. You may experience understandable sound when you go for your activation. It

may take weeks, months and in some cases years. Keeping your expectations low and your hopes in balance will help you thru those days when you might feel as if you have made the worst mistake of your life. It does get better. For some it's faster than others, but very few people report no improvement at all. Patience, patience, patience.

9. Your job is to make the decision of which type you want for yourself or your child. To make this a little easier, after you have been thru all the processes above, take a sheet of paper and write the pros on one side and the cons on the other of each implant type. Be sure that what you have written is what is most important to you. Once this is done, you should have your decision and when you do - stick with it - no matter what it is. Don't look back. Don't let others try to tell you that your decision is wrong. It is your decision and if they sway you in another direction and you end up disappointed, you are going to feel the need to blame them. This is a very important decision, a very happy decision, and a very meaningful decision. Enjoy your right to make it.

No matter what you choose, I doubt you will go wrong.

Good Luck! There's a great big hearing world out there waiting for you.

Alice

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