

Local Health Commentary

A VIEW FROM THE VILLAGES HEALTH

Sometimes people who were doing well with hearing aids find their ability to understand has declined. When other devices no longer provide adequate support, a cochlear implant may be the best option.

Unlike traditional hearing aids, a cochlear device is surgically implanted and does not have to go through the ear to the ear canal and move the eardrum and bones.

None of those parts matter anymore because the implant bypasses the hair cells and directly stimulates the hearing nerve.

Volume does not always equal clarity, so hearing aids aren't always helpful for speech discrimination.

With a cochlear implant, many patients who have struggled to participate in conversations, whether in quiet or noisy environments, can become more socially active.

Are Cochlear Implants a Safe Hearing Option?

The American Academy of Audiology notes that 183,100 Cochlear devices have been implanted in the United States.

Throughout my career, I've seen many children and adults successfully achieve hearing with these implants, and they're becoming much more common as candidacy has expanded and more patients are now qualifying for them.

Research shows that patients can qualify sooner than we previously thought, but there are a lot of steps we take to ensure a patient is a candidate because, after we perform the surgery, the device is meant to last a lifetime.

It's not extremely invasive, painful or difficult in terms of recovery. It takes around two hours with patients under general anesthesia.

Acquiring a Device

The process of receiving a cochlear implant is lengthy and includes several appointments with a team of providers and individuals.

Choosing the manufacturer of your cochlear implant is an important step and there is a lot to consider.

Once implanted, the devices are with you for a lifetime, and you are

essentially "married" to that manufacturer. As with hearing aids, there are several options.

To determine which manufacturer a patient prefers, I have them meet with the representatives of companies to review each of the products in great detail.



Kathryn Livesay

Having a full picture of the manufacturers that produce these hearing implants can help patients make an informed decision based on their individual needs.

To help assist in this learning process, we have introduced quarterly meet-and-greet opportunities at The Villages Health's Pinellas Care Center.

We are happy to welcome patients who would like to explore their options and meet our team.

We see patients at all stages in the cochlear implant journey — from evaluation to those who've had implants for many years, and we invite you to ask your questions!

Get Important Information

Attend our event, hosted by Cochlear Americas, from 2 to 3:30 p.m. March 7 at the Pinellas Care Center Café (2485 Pinellas Place, The Villages, FL 32163).

Please register at the following link if you are interested in attending: tinyurl.com/bdz5my4s or contact Amanda Simpson, amsimpson@cochlear.com, 225-465-9289.

Dr. Kathryn Livesay is an audiologist with The Villages Health.

Positive Aging

BY MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

It's no secret that I've been labeled an alternative health advocate for most of my adult life. There's something undeniably seductive about the idea of trying to be the captain of your fate when it comes to taking care of your body.

For that reason, I've been a huge fan of Dan Buettner, the National Geographic fellow and New York Times best-selling author. If the name seems familiar, it's because he wrote the 2008 book "The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest" and the 2015 book "The Blue Zones Solution: Eating and Living Like the World's Healthiest People."

In 2002, Buettner met with demographer and scientist at the National Institute on Aging in Washington, D.C., and earned a grant to research longevity hotspots around the world. He first made his findings public in the National Geographic November 2005 issue with the article "The Secrets of Living Longer,"

which became the third best-selling issue ever in the magazine's history. Three years later, "The Blue Zones" was published, and Buettner became the patron saint of longevity.

The good news is that protecting our lifespan through diet and lifestyle choices doesn't mean you have to embrace deprivation.

We do, however, need to pay attention to what we eat and drink, as well as how we use our bodies.

Buettner spent large chunks of time studying communities in Ikaria, Greece; Okinawa, Japan; Ogliastra Region, Sardinia; the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica; and Loma Linda, California. These were named Blue Zones.

The people in these communities significantly outlive the rest of us and experience lower rates of dementia, diabetes and heart disease.

In "The Blue Zone Solution," Buettner tells us that the inhabitants of these areas are "products of their environment" who walk a lot, grow their own vegetables, go to bed late and give themselves permission to sleep in whenever they feel like it.

One thing that all these people have in common is they eat about a cup of beans each day. Most of us already know that beans are high in fiber, micronutrients and vitamins, and that they eliminate our need for animal protein. But what I didn't know until I read his book was that eating meat creates a bad balance of gut bacteria in order to digest it.

If you eat a lot of meat, the necessary bacteria to digest it causes inflammation, which is at the root of every

age-related disease. Eating beans, however, teaches your gut to switch to a different type of flora that lowers inflammation and seems to discourage obesity.

In Okinawa, Japan, about 6.5 people out of every 10,000 live to age 100. In the U.S., that rate is only 1.73 in 10,000. One of their unique approaches to health is they make sure to eat something from the land and something from the sea every day.

Buettner discovered that Blue Zone people tend to lead physically active lives and eat much less in the way of animal products than we do. He predicts: "our meat-eating habits are going to be looked at in the same way as we look at our smoking habits in the 1970s. ... no one will be ignoring the fact that it is lowering our life expectancy."

Back in 2008, Buettner designed a plan with AARP to apply the Blue Zones guidelines to American towns. The first chosen area was Albert Lea, Minnesota, and the plan of attack was to create a healthy environment rather than try to dramatically alter or overhaul individual behaviors. Part of the challenge of turning a community from "normal" to "health-promoting" included building newly connected sidewalks and trails that reach the downtown area, local hospitals, neighborhoods and parks. By adding as little as 1.7 miles of sidewalk, residents were able to cycle, skate or walk to destinations rather than drive.

According to Buettner, 18 other American cities hope to be included in the Blue Zone project, which has already been shown to help

residents lower their body mass index, stop smoking, exercise more and make healthier eating choices.

Cities like Albert Lea also save on health care costs when they adopt a Blue Zone lifestyle and focus on the ecology of wellness -- which includes healthy natural foods and a more physically active way of life.

For Blue Zone activity, the goal is to keep moving throughout the day, meaning less sitting.

Your activities don't have to be strenuous, but they should be continuous. And when it comes to food, a modified Mediterranean diet -- beans (especially black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans and lentils), fruit, honey, olive oil, vegetables and small amounts of meat, dairy products and alcohol -- seems to work best.

According to Buettner, vitality is the intersection of a long life and an active life. It's not only living for a long time but also being able to live in an engaged way so you enjoy your life.

Here are a few suggestions that can easily enhance your longevity no matter where you live:

- » Drink wine moderately and regularly.
- » Move your body regularly. Walking, gardening and housework count.
- » Eat a mainly plant-based diet.
- » Stop eating when your stomach is 80% full.
- » Feel free to drink strong coffee.

To find out more about Marilyn and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate at www.creators.com.

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