TALKING POINTS

HOW SIGHT AFFECTS OUR TASTE
KEEPING BRAIN-FIT
MYTHS ABOUT HEARING LOSS

ASK US ABOUT FREE FULL HEARING ASSESSMENTS

Melina Joy OPTICIANS

THE HEARING CARE PARTNERSHIP

A WARM WELCOME **FROM US TO YOU**

Catriona and David are delighted to introduce you to our exciting new edition of Talking Points, our joint magazine produced with The Hearing Care Partnership. It is packed full of engaging features and useful information, shining a spotlight on helping patients to see, hear and live life more fully.

To start things off, we delve into a little hearing loss myth-busting with the help of The Hearing Care Partnership's expert team. We also explore just how important your sight is when it comes to taste, with the help of Sunday Times' wine critic Will Lyons. There are tips on managing dry eyes, and we share evidence linking hearing health to brain health – with a little workout to help keep your brain in tiptop condition.

Happy reading, and we look forward to seeing you in practice soon.

All the team at Melina Joy Opticians

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7 MYTHS ABOUT HEARING LOSS

AND WHY THEY'RE NOT TRUE.

Ashish Shah is an audiologist who works as part of The Hearing Care Partnership's Clinical Services team. These are some of the most common misconceptions about hearing health that he has encountered over the years.

MYTH:

It's easy to tell if you have a hearing loss.

FACT:

Many people notice the symptoms of hearing loss before the hearing loss itself. Indicators of hearing loss can include:

Fatigue: your brain is having to work much harder to establish what people are saying.

Lower energy levels: when you have a hearing loss, listening effort is significantly increased.

Social isolation: many people will stop enjoying and attending social events because of problems hearing.

Mental decline: untreated hearing loss results in less stimulation of the auditory cortex. This accelerates mental decline, resulting in a higher risk of dementia.

MYTH:

If you have a hearing loss, you won't be able to hear most sounds.

FACT:

Most people with a hearing loss don't notice difficulty hearing in all situations. Hearing usually changes very gradually so we get used to missing out on soft sounds: leaves rustling, clocks ticking, soft breathing. For most people, hearing deteriorates in the high frequencies, such as 's' 'sh' and 'f' sounds, resulting in a loss of clarity, rather than volume.

This results in:

- **Speech sounding mumbled.**
- **Difficulty hearing in a restaurant (or any background noise) situation.**
- **Ability to hear doors slamming in the distance, but problems hearing speech clearly.**

MYTH:

Hearing aids make your ears lazy.

FACT:

Hearing aids support your brain.

If you have hearing loss, the earlier you are fitted with hearing aids the better. Untreated hearing loss results in auditory deprivation, where the brain loses the ability to interpret words due to a lack of stimulation over an extended period of time. Hearing aids provide regular stimulation of the auditory cortex, helping to prevent or reverse auditory deprivation.

MYTH:

It's better to leave wearing hearing aids until your hearing is worse.

FACT:

Hearing aids reduce deterioration of hearing.

If you wear hearing aids, your auditory pathway is able to function more normally. This results in a slower rate of deterioration in your hearing. Therefore the longer you leave it, the quicker your hearing deteriorates and the more auditory deprivation develops.

MYTH:

There is nothing you can do to help tinnitus.

FACT:

Tinnitus is often a symptom of hearing loss. Therefore, many people find that wearing hearing aids stops them from being aware of their tinnitus.

Tinnitus is the sensation of hearing sound for which there is no external source. This is often a ringing, buzzing or hissing noise. Many people with hearing loss experience tinnitus because the auditory cortex (the hearing part of your brain) receives less stimulation from your ear. Tinnitus often occurs at the same frequency as the hearing loss. In fact, 90% of tinnitus occurs as a result of hearing loss. Many people find that wearing hearing aids prevents them hearing tinnitus. Many hearing aids are now fitted with a tinnitus relief system – speak to one of our audiologists who can advise you on the best hearing aids to help you.

MYTH:

Hearing loss only affects older people.

FACT:

Our hearing changes from a young age.

Our hearing becomes less sensitive to high frequency sounds from as early as our twenties. 50% of people have a high frequency hearing loss by the age of 50. This can particularly affect the ability to hear in background noise or group situations.

MYTH:

A hearing assessment is only for people who have concerns about their hearing.

FACT:

Hearing and ear health should be monitored at regular intervals, whatever your age.

Like visiting the dentist, or having regular eye examinations, it is important to have your hearing and ear health monitored to detect any changes. Every hearing test that you have with us is recorded, allowing us to identify and inform you of any changes over time. It is never too early to have your first hearing check.

We are here to help

If you have any questions or concerns about your hearing or that of a loved one, or would simply like more information, you can book a free hearing test online at **thcp.co.uk/book** or call us on **0800 52 00 546.** Alternatively, speak to our team in practice.

HOW IMPORTANT IS SIGHT WHEN IT COMES TO TASTE?

When someone pours you a glass of deep purple Shiraz on a cold winter's night, and your eyes watch the wine fill the glass, does your mouth water in anticipation? Or how about watching a glass of ice-cold, salmon-pink, Provençal rosé being poured on a blisteringly hot summer's day?

Thirsty questions from Will Lyons, wine columnist for The Sunday Times, Vice President of The Sunday Times Wine Club and host of the award-winning Wine Times podcast.

For years scientists have been studying the effect of sight on how we perceive food tastes. We already know that taste buds on our tongue detect flavours and help us to identify the foods we eat. But other senses play a key role in how we experience our foods, particularly our sight.

For the wine professional, what we see in the glass is as important as what we smell, taste and feel in our mouths. It's why in 67 Pall Mall, a club for wine lovers in London, their basement tasting room has overhead lighting which mimics the midday sun in Bordeaux, perfect conditions to assess the wine in the glass. It's no coincidence that many professional tastings are now held there.

But when it comes to taste, looks can also be deceptive. A remarkable study from the University of Bordeaux in France, saw wine science students given two wines to assess. They were not told what the wines were or where they were made. Instead, they were asked to describe the flavour of each wine in writing.

The students described the white wine with tasting notes such as citrus, apple and peach. Similarly, with the red wine they used descriptions like cherries, blackcurrant and pepper. What they were not told is that both wines were exactly the same, only one had been artificially coloured red with an odourless dye.

Not one of them detected that they were in fact tasting the same wine. Now, these were by no means amateurs, they were wine science students.

Why? Well, our eyes are incredible organs, sending messages to our brain which are stored for some time after. We not only taste with our tongue, but we also form an overall perception of the taste based on what we feel, smell, hear, remember and—most importantly—see.

"OUR EYES ARE INCREDIBLE ORGANS, SENDING MESSAGES TO OUR BRAIN, WHICH ARE STORED FOR SOME TIME AFTER."

Speaking at the 245th National Meeting & Exposition of the American Chemical Society (ACS), Terry E. Acree, Ph.D. said that people actually can see the flavour of foods before they taste them, and the eyes have such a powerful role that they can trump the tongue and the nose.

It's linked to memory and our past. Our ancestors used their sense of sight to find food, and we quickly learned what food was good for us through visual clues. For example, a green strawberry was unripe, whereas a red strawberry was delicious and nutritious to eat.

In this way, our brains amass a bank of memories which link certain colours with specific flavours. So when it comes to our glass of Shiraz, the visual clues trigger flavour associations and from the moment your eyes see the wine poured into the glass, chances are it's already made up its mind as to what you'll enjoy before you even put it in your mouth.

Which means looking after our sight has even more importance, where the full sensory enjoyment of food —and drink—is concerned.

Returning to the wine study, it illustrates that our sight doesn't just work more quickly than our sense of taste and smell, in fact it might even override it.

So the next time you have one of your wine friends over to dinner, try it. Even better, have a go yourself. Ask someone to pour a white wine and a red wine into two mugs, close your eyes and see if you can taste which is which. You might find it's harder than it seems.

PERFECTLY IN BALANCE

As well as enabling you to hear, your ears perform a host of other functions, including helping you to maintain your balance. Discover how taking care of your hearing can help you stay firmly on your feet.

HOW DO WE BALANCE?

In a nutshell, three areas of your body work together to help your brain maintain your sense of balance – eyes, limbs and inner ear. Your eyes help you see where you're standing, and orient you within your environment. Sensors in your joints, muscles and tendons help your brain understand the position and movement of your limbs. They work together with the vestibular system in your inner ear, which senses the rotational and linear movements of your head and body, and relays that important information to your brain.

CAN HEARING LOSS AFFECT YOUR BALANCE?

Problems with your inner ear, such as an ear infection, can mean that hearing loss occurs at the same time as balance impairment – although one does not necessarily cause the other. In addition, hearing loss also reduces your awareness of the environment and can make you more susceptible to falling.

FEELING A LITTLE UNBALANCED?

If you think you may be experiencing balance impairment, your first point of contact should be your GP. However, difficulties with balance may also indicate a problem in your inner ear which could also affect your hearing. So don't ignore it – remember that hearing loss is a gradual process that can progressively impact your quality of life in various ways. The best course of action for hearing concerns is to visit The Hearing Care Partnership for your free hearing assessment.

HOW CAN YOUR EYES HELP YOUR BALANCE?

Clear vision is essential to help prevent falls and trips. It's worth noting that due to the distortions that are present in bifocal and varifocal lenses, they are not always the most appropriate form of correction for people who are at risk of falls. If you're using bifocals or varifocals, it's crucial that they are correctly fitted to provide clear vision at the relevant distances for walking safely.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you have hearing or sight concerns, talk to our experts – book your eye exam or free hearing assessment with us today. If you have balance concerns, please talk to your GP.

RED, SORE OR WATERY EYES?

DRY EYE – EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW.

From time to time we all feel like our eyes can get dry and tired, but if your eyes regularly feel red, sore and uncomfortable, you might be suffering from dry eye.

Dry eye is common and occurs when your tears evaporate faster than usual, or if your eyes cannot produce enough tears. Tears don't just flow when you start welling up while watching a sad film, they should always be there, to constantly lubricate your eyes. You can also have dry eyes despite tears rolling down your cheeks – if the tears are of poor quality, they do not stay on the surface of your eyes.

Dry eye becomes more common as you get older because we produce fewer tears and our eyelids are less effective in spreading the tears across the surface of our eyes – about 33% of people over 65 experience problems with dry eyes.

However, this condition is also becoming more prevalent in young people, and it's thought to be related to excessive screen use. When we're looking at a screen we blink less frequently, less fully and at a lower rate, so our tears evaporate and are not spread evenly over the surface of the eyes.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

If you have itchy eyes, redness, the sensation of having something in your eye, you could have dry eyes. We can diagnose dry eye by thoroughly discussing your symptoms and making an assessment of the front of your eye (the anterior eye). This includes a fluorescein or lissamine green dye test. These dyes highlight dry or damaged cells and help us examine the flow of tears, as does the use of specialist diagnostic instruments.

WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

There's no single cause of dry eye syndrome, but there are a number of factors that can contribute.

Underlying medical conditions, such as blepharitis (an inflammation of the eyelids), lupus, contact dermatitis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Side effects of some medicines, such as antihistamines, antidepressants and diuretics.

During menopause, pregnancy, or while using the contraceptive pill.

Dry, windy weather or high altitude.

Central heating and air conditioning in the home, office or car.

Following cataract and laser eye surgery.

Reading, writing or working at a computer without breaks. Blinking regularly can help to stimulate the flow of tears across the whole of your eyes.

HOW CAN IT BE TREATED?

You can make the most of your natural tears by drinking more fluids and staying well hydrated, and eating more foods containing omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids, such as oily fish, sunflower seeds and walnuts.

You can also try artificial tear eye drops. This is a common treatment clinically proven to relieve the gritty, sore sensation of dry eye syndrome. Pop into our practice to pick up artificial tear eye drops that hydrate and protect the surface of the eye.

WE CAN TAKE A LOOK

If you have concerns about dry eye and would like to book an appointment to find out more, or simply want to try eye drops, please contact us.

KEEP BRAIN-FIT

Study examines the link between hearing aids and brain health.

For years, we've known that hearing loss—when left unaddressed—can lead to an increased risk of dementia. And now, research published by the University of Exeter and King's College London has found that wearing an effective hearing aid can reduce this risk by helping you to maintain brain function into later life.

THE FACTS

According to the World Health Organisation, age-related hearing loss is estimated to affect one third of people over the age of 65. When we lose our hearing, our brains begin to decline faster. Research shows the rate of cognitive decline is approximately 30-40% faster in people with age-related hearing loss and is thought to be an even greater contributor to the risk of dementia than factors such as hypertension and obesity.

SMALL CHANGES, BIG RESULTS

The study surveyed 25,000 people aged 50 or over and split them into two groups—one of whom wore hearing aids and one who didn't. Both groups undertook annual cognitive tests over two years, the results of which were surprising.

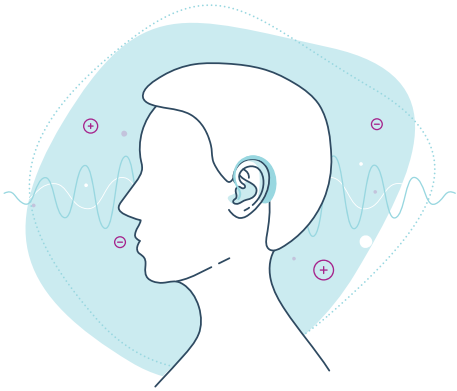
The group with hearing aids performed better in cognitive tasks, with many displaying faster reaction times and increased working memory. Scientists explain this could well be down to the fact that the majority of their brain power wasn't tied up in straining to hear, or having to listen intently to someone speaking.

"PREVIOUS RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT HEARING LOSS IS LINKED TO A LOSS OF BRAIN FUNCTION, MEMORY AND AN INCREASED RISK OF DEMENTIA. OUR WORK IS ONE OF THE LARGEST STUDIES TO LOOK AT THE IMPACT OF WEARING A HEARING AID, AND SUGGESTS THAT WEARING ONE COULD ACTUALLY PROTECT THE BRAIN."

Dr Anne Corbett, University of Exeter

PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The sooner we treat hearing loss by wearing hearing aids, the more of our brain we can protect. Further discussion regarding the impact on dementia can be found in the BBC article 'Nine lifestyle changes can reduce dementia risk'(1), which suggests the risk can be reduced by a third if we improve our lifestyle choices, are healthy and treat hearing loss early. Research tells us that, if you've been advised you need a hearing aid, it's a good idea to find one that works for you sooner rather than later.



"WE KNOW THAT WE COULD REDUCE DEMENTIA RISK BY A THIRD IF WE ALL TOOK ACTION FROM MID LIFE. THE MESSAGE HERE IS THAT IF YOU'RE ADVISED YOU NEED A HEARING AID, FIND ONE THAT WORKS FOR YOU. AT THE VERY LEAST IT WILL IMPROVE YOUR HEARING AND IT COULD HELP KEEP YOUR BRAIN SHARP TOO."

Professor Clive Ballard, University of Exeter Medical School

HEARING TECHNOLOGY

While your ears collect sound, it's your brain that actually understands it. Every brain is unique and so we're here to find the right hearing aids for you—one that not only fits well but also reconnects you with your wider world.

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thcp.co.uk/prices-and-packages

(1) bbc.co.uk/news/health-40655566

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