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**Patient Experiences Extreme Hearing Loss from Lyme Disease**

Audiologists can effectively diagnose and treat hearing loss

**RESTON, Va., Aug. 30, 2017—**The American Academy of Audiology is working on educating the public on the many factors that can contribute to hearing loss and the seriousness of that loss. A new report by the [Lancet commission](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)33097-0/fulltext) on dementia recently cited hearing loss as one of nine risk factors for dementia.

When Teresa Jennings was first diagnosed with Lyme disease in 2011 from a tick bite, she had

no idea how much worse her life would become. As if chronic fatigue and other Lyme symptoms were not enough, within a year-and-a-half after her diagnosis, her hearing in both ears began to severely decline.

Jennings started treatment at a clinic in Washington, D.C. where she traveled from Illinois every three months for medical care. When her hearing first began to decline, she saw several audiologists for hearing aids but the cost was not affordable so she went to a large, national big- box discount store and purchased hearing aids.

After wearing the hearing aids but struggling to hear sufficiently, Jennings finally decided to again see an audiologist in 2015 and she found one in Highland Park, Ill. She is the executive director of the Barrington Park District in Barrington, Ill., where she has been since 1992. Her hearing loss was having a serious impact on her work and her confidence. She was also starting to experience depression. The Highland Park audiologist was willing to work with Jennings on a payment plan. Because her Lyme medical expenses were so high and she’d met her deductible, her insurance covered some of the cost. With this financial assistance and flexibility, Jennings purchased hearing aids and suddenly realized the tremendous difference—she could actually hear! She took out a loan to pay off the balance.

“We wanted to make sure that she had the correct hearing aids,” said Tracy Murphy, AuD, an audiologist and board member of the American Academy of Audiology who treated Jennings. Murphy works with North Shore Audio-Vestibular Lab in Highland Park. “Being properly fit makes all the difference in terms of success with hearing aids, as Teresa found out first hand.”

Since Murphy partners with an Ear, Nose and Throat practice she recommended that Jennings see an ENT who would order an MRI of her brain just to rule out the chance of a brain tumor or any other cause of her rapidly progressive hearing loss. “Since the hearing loss was so rapid, which is unusual, we just wanted to rule out other causes,” Murphy explained. The MRI was negative and it was determined that Jennings had neurological Lyme.

“Many Lyme patients lose their hearing from the disease,” stated Murphy. Jennings was 58 when she was diagnosed with Lyme disease so both patient and audiologist knew that age was not likely related to the cause. “Teresa’s hearing loss was severe to profound,” said Murphy.

At a time when Lyme disease is exploding across the country (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that approximately 300,000 new cases take place a year with only

30,000 cases reported), Murphy cautions anyone who begins experiencing hearing loss to see an audiologist who, if suspicious of Lyme disease, may recommend seeing a Lyme specialist to get tested. “Many cases of Lyme disease go undiagnosed in the early stages,” cautions Murphy.

Jennings adds that “Seeing an audiologist is key and paying attention to his or her hearing aid recommendations is important. Many audiologists will work with you and find a way to pay for hearing aids.”

With audiologic rehabilitation and customized and professionally programmed hearing aids, Jennings was able to fully return to her job and her normal productivity.

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org.](http://www.howsyourhearing.org/)