

## **WHEN SILENCE ARRIVES**

### **ONLY ONE OUT OF TEN PEOPLE WITH DEAF PROBLEMS RECEIVE TREATMENT.**

**José Marte is a happy man. His son, Joenny, is a cute five-year-old little boy who likes to hang out with his friends, read books and play baseball. Jose and his wife, María, are very happy because they can talk to their son without any problem.**

Joenny was born deaf but thanks to a cochlear implant he can listen. He lives a normal life and he can even speak English and Spanish.

José Marte says, "There is nothing as beautiful as watching your son grow healthy and happy". Unfortunately, Joenny's case is very common and numbers about deafness are alarming.

Hearing loss is America's number one birth defect and it affects 28 million people of all ages. Two million Americans are completely deaf and one in every one thousand infants is born deaf.

The number of people with hearing loss problems is growing due to the use of I-pods and walkmans and also to bad habits like listening to high volume music.

Founder of The Children's Hearing Institute in New York and co-director of The Beth Israel/New York Eye & Ear Cochlear Implant Center, doctor Simon Parisier, MD says, "There is not much knowledge about the way to correct this problem".

"Approximately 80,000 people have received cochlear implants. However we think that around 750,000 people need a cochlear implant. It means that only 10% of people with hearing loss are receiving a good treatment that enables them to listen".

In Joenny's case, hearing loss was detected when he was three months old. The case of Roberto Peña was very different. He lost hearing during his life.

His problem came to a critical point when he could not hear anything. This kind gentleman from the Dominican Republic says "We have had hearing problems in my family, but my hearing loss got worse when I had an accident when I was twelve years old. I did not look for medical advice and since then I started to lose my hearing. When I was 40 years old I could barely listen".

Like Joenny, Peña can listen again thanks to a cochlear implant. "I have recovered 75% of my hearing and because of my follow up, I keep recovering more and more," he says.

"In the beginning I did not want to have a cochlear implant because it had to be carried like a beeper. But when I was 52 I went under surgery and now I feel very glad I did it. Now I can do things I could not do before like watching TV and talk to my friends without any problem".

### **An implant to listen**

The cochlea is the most important organ in the hearing system. A cochlear implant is one of the best treatments for deafness and the results are very positive. A cochlear implant is an electronic device. It has two parts. One part is surgically placed inside the inner ear while the other external part is worn behind the ear.

Doctors Simon C. Parisier, MD and George Alexiades MD from The New York Eye & Ear Infirmary and St. Luke's and Roosevelt Hospitals, are experts in this kind of surgery. Dr. Parisier explains: "For an expert surgeon, cochlear implantation is a normal operation. From the patient point of view, it is a two and half hour operation that requires general anesthesia".

Dr. Alexiades says that "It is an operation on the hearing system and no part of the brain is ever touched".

After surgery comes an adjustment process. Audiologist Lisa Rosenberg says “The implant is not a device that corrects deafness immediately. At the beginning, the patient is not going to listen very well, but the more he or she uses it, the more they will get used to it and will understand sounds and words”.

Rosenberg explains us that every case is different and that hearing experiences differ from one person to another. Many adults who have received a cochlear implant do not like it very much because they say that it sounds like Mickey Mouse or cartoons. But kids who were born deaf get used to it very quickly.

### **Taking care of your hearing!**

Early detection and adequate treatment are very important to solve deaf problems. Lisa Rosenberg, audiologist of The Children’s Hearing Institute says “By law, every child has to receive a hearing test before leaving the hospital”. Rosenberg says that this is important because “if a child has hearing problems and does not receive therapy and treatment, he will have difficulties in developing his communication skills”.

Cochlear implants are very expensive but they are included in almost all private insurance and also in Medicaid and Medicare. If you want more information about cochlear implants, you can call The New York Eye & Ear Cochlear Implant Center at (212) 614 – 8370 or visit the web site of The Children’s Hearing Institute [www.childrenshearing.org](http://www.childrenshearing.org).