



Rick Berger served in the US Air Force for four years during the Vietnam War as combat journalist. He continued serving the country in the FBI for 30 years and has since been an entertainer. Since receiving his implants, he has enjoyed hearing music again.

How long did you wear hearing aids? Where did you obtain them?

I never wore traditional hearing aids because I had normal hearing until my sudden hearing loss (in a span of five minutes) in my left ear in 2010. I weighed the options which included a cochlear implant (CI), CROS hearing aids and an auditory osseointegrated device. I opted for the osseointegrated device since it required less invasive surgery than the cochlear implant. I obtained it from a private surgeon. I wore it for several years. It would wirelessly send sound to my “good” ear, the right one. However, it failed to provide hearing in my left ear, so I eventually decided to step up to the cochlear implant in an effort to regain hearing in that ear.

How did your CI journey begin?

I contacted the New York University (NYU) Cochlear Implant Center, whom I had contacted when I first considered a CI along with the other options. They informed that as a veteran I may be eligible. Luckily, I dealt with the same personnel that I had talked with eight years before. My audiologist (the incredible Betsy Bromberg) told me that she is the VA rep at the facility and that she would begin the process to get me approved for the surgery. I was overjoyed when I heard (no pun intended) the news that I had been approved.

What was the hardest part about the process of getting a cochlear implant?

Waiting to see if I would be approved was the most taxing part. I was concerned that I would be turned down since I had single-sided hearing.

What could be done to improve the process for veterans (of getting a cochlear implant)?

Of course, the most obvious improvement would simply be to speed up the process. It took six months for my surgery to be approved. Also, making veterans aware, through the online VA newsletter etc. that veterans should consider getting a CI if they have difficulty hearing with hearing aids and that it is a safe and effective way to deal with significant hearing loss.

What worked well for you? What compliment(s) can you make of the VA process?

I couldn't have been treated any better! The VA hospital even put my wife and me up overnight in the hospital so we wouldn't have to travel to the hospital on the day of surgery.

Who performed your surgery and where was it done? What about the follow up services?

Dr. Friedman performed the surgery. It was done at the VA hospital in New York City. Follow-up services were, and continue to be, great. I have my periodic appointments with my audiologist and travel costs for these visits are paid for by the VA.

Were there any mishaps? Any suggestions for improvement?

There were no mishaps and I had no problems with the process. I wouldn't change a thing.

Did you have any rehabilitation besides mapping?

I had in-person "listening therapy" and practiced the exercises I was given at home on my iPad.

Do you have any tips for those veterans who could be candidates for a CI?

Yes. Seriously consider getting a CI. We're incredibly lucky to be living in an age of technology where this miracle process is available. I'm so glad I have my hearing back thanks to my implant!

Mr. Berger has experienced important quality of life improvements from a CI to address his single sided deafness. He has been pleased with the all aspects of the process including the post-surgery follow up.