

# HEARING

## YOUR BEST



Information From Associated Audiologists, Inc. – “Hearing Your Best for Life”

Vol. 13, Issue 1

## Associated Audiologists, Inc. Welcomes Dr. Smittkamp to Practice

Susan Smittkamp, Au.D., Ph.D., FAAA, recently joined Associated Audiologists, Inc., and is seeing patients at the practice's Shawnee Mission office. Dr. Smittkamp is already a familiar face to many of the office's patients, having worked while Laura Flowers, Au.D., FAAA, was on family leave last year.

“The audiologists in this practice are leaders in this field,” Dr. Smittkamp says. “They uphold the highest patient care standards and a professional code of ethics, two things that are very important to me. I am thrilled to join them in their mission of providing exemplary hearing healthcare to the Kansas City metropolitan area.”

Dr. Smittkamp was drawn to the field of audiology because she finds the auditory system fascinating. She earned her doctorate in audiology with an emphasis in auditory neuroscience in 2004. Her doctoral research focused on the effects of aging and cochlear damage on the auditory brainstem in a preclinical model.

Before joining Associated Audiologists, she performed preclinical neuroscience research at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. Her research has been published in a variety of peer-reviewed journals.

“My goal has always been for my work to help people live healthier lives,” Dr. Smittkamp says. “However, in the preclinical research environment, you may not see the benefit of your work for years, or even in your lifetime. I enjoy working in the practice because I have the opportunity to make a more immediate positive impact on my patients' lives.”

Dr. Smittkamp has a special interest in assisting patients with hearing loss and tinnitus and she has advanced training in the neuromonics tinnitus treatment. “The psycho-social effects of hearing loss and tinnitus can be devastating and far-reaching,” she says. “Fortunately, there has never been a better time to seek treatment for both conditions. It is so rewarding to work with patients and their families to overcome these challenges and improve their quality of life.”

Dr. Smittkamp is originally from Peoria, Illinois. She came to Kansas City for graduate school and now calls the area home. She and her husband, Paul, reside in Overland Park with their three daughters. She serves on the Family Advisory Board for her daughters' school. She also enjoys reading and spending time with family and friends.



To schedule an appointment  
with Dr. Smittkamp, call 913-403-0018.

# HEARING YOUR BEST



## Hear Here...

By Tim Steele, Ph.D., FAAA, President,  
Associated Audiologists, Inc.

### Buyer Beware!

I'm sure that many of you have seen the TV commercials advertising the "Wax Vac." I had a patient who recently purchased this device and got the tip of the "Wax Vac" stuck deep in his ear canal, causing him excruciating pain.

Luckily, I was able to safely remove the tip in the office that same day. I then purchased a "Wax Vac" to check it out. Actually, it was a "buy two for the price of one" deal. In testing the device, we learned the "Wax Vac" doesn't even have enough suction to pick up a tissue. If it did have enough suction to remove wax from the ear canal, it could also be strong enough to damage the ear drum. This "buy two for the price of one" consumer gimmick is probably as old as snake oil and cure-all potions. The old adage of "buyer beware" definitely applies to this product. After our evaluation, we recommend you save your money and resist the temptation to try it for yourself.

Like the "Wax Vac" gimmick, many of the ads and mailers you see touting low-cost hearing aids can be enticing. But remember what we often tell our kids, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true."

When it comes to the complexities of hearing loss, tinnitus, and other ear disorders, coupled with the intricacies of hearing aid technology, shortcuts and discounts can end up costing you time and money. The key to hearing your best is to work with a trusted professional audiologist who adheres to a code of ethics and who offers you options specific to your lifestyle and budget.

We thank you for the privilege of working with you and are proud of the confidence you've placed in Associated Audiologists, Inc. We take the responsibility of providing excellence in audiological care for hearing loss, tinnitus, and dizziness/balance seriously, and consider it a pleasure to help guide you with any questions you may have regarding information or mis-information that you may receive.

So, before you get "sucked up" in the hype of anything you see about wax, hearing loss, pills for tinnitus, mail order hearing devices, or self-treatment for vertigo, please consult with us. We are hear (here) for you.



## Technology Update

*If your hearing aids are four years old or older,  
you may want to consider a new family of hearing  
aids WIDEX has recently launched called the  
WIDEX DREAM™ 440.*

Driven by TRUE ISP, a new groundbreaking technological platform, the WIDEX DREAM™ 440 sets a new standard in hearing aid performance.

"The WIDEX DREAM™ 440 offers our patients a more true-to-life, natural hearing experience," explains Tim Steele, Ph.D., FAAA, president of Associated Audiologists. "This hearing aid allows more sound in than any other hearing aid available."

Ultimately, that means you hear more details of the world around you. You are better able to hear in speech more clearly and hear better in backgrounds of noise.

"This hearing aid can help you enjoy conversations once again, even in noisy social situations, such as at concerts, in restaurants, or at sporting events," Dr. Steele says.

**To find out more about the WIDEX DREAM™ 440,  
call any of our offices or talk with your audiologist.**



Join the conversation!  
Find us on facebook.

[www.facebook.com/hearingyourbest](http://www.facebook.com/hearingyourbest)





# Common Dizziness

## Vestibular Clinic Specializes in Treating BPPV

### Did you know?

The most common cause of vertigo (spinning dizziness) is a condition called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV). This condition will affect 50 percent of people at some point in their lives. Fortunately, BPPV can be easily diagnosed and treated.

### Symptoms of BPPV

BPPV causes a short sensation of vertigo when an individual lies flat in bed, rolls over, sits up from lying back, bends at the waist, or looks up/down with their head. This sensation of spinning is very short, lasting less than one minute. When not experiencing spinning, having a general sense of lightheadedness and imbalance is very common.

### Consequences of BPPV

In addition to vertigo with positional changes, BPPV can have a number of other very serious consequences. In a recent scientific study, it was shown that individuals with this condition experience twice the number of falls as other individuals the same age. This study also showed a significant reduction in the ability to complete normal day-to-day activities. Finally, people with BPPV have almost twice the rate of depression; the theory is that depression rates go up because having vertigo is very stressful.

### Causes of BPPV

BPPV is caused by small calcium carbonate particles (otoconia), which

are normally found in the inner ear. These particles can become displaced and migrate into one of the ear's semi-circular canals, where they do not belong. BPPV may be the result of the natural aging process, illness, a change in medication, or head trauma. BPPV is often idiopathic (no known cause can be identified).

### Diagnosis of BPPV

Through comprehensive testing, our dizziness specialists can very accurately diagnose this condition. This definitive diagnosis will help guide treatment. It is also important to note that other underlying ear issues can be a cause of this condition, which will also be identified through advanced testing.

### Treatment of BPPV

Fortunately, this very troubling condition can be easily treated. The treatment does not involve medication or surgery, and is the gold standard for this condition. The treatment, which is performed by doctors all over the world, has a very high efficacy rate. In fact, our practice has treated thousands of patients and our success rate approaches 99.6 percent.



### FINDING HELP FOR BPPV

**Samuel Bittel, Au.D., FAAA**, Vestibular Program Director, and **Tammy Gonzales, Au.D., FAAA**, vestibular audiologist, specialize in treating patients with BPPV, as well as other dizziness and balance disorders. They provide comprehensive vestibular evaluations, and consult with each patient's primary care providers regarding their diagnosis and treatment recommendations.

Both audiologists see patients at our Shawnee Mission Medical Center office in the Antioch Hills Medical Building and at our Overland Park office in the Southridge Medical Building. Dr. Gonzales also now sees patients in our Manhattan clinic twice each month.

**To schedule an appointment with one of them, please call Tanja at 913-403-0018 in the Kansas City area; or Kelly at 785-539-7361 in the Manhattan area.**

## Hearing Loss May be Connected to Dementia, Alzheimer's Disease

A study released in 2011 from researchers at Johns Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging found adults with hearing loss are significantly more likely than adults with normal hearing to develop dementia. The study also found that the greater the hearing loss, the higher the risk.

**M**en and women in the study who experienced severe hearing loss were five times more likely to develop dementia than those with normal hearing. But even mild hearing loss doubled the risk of dementia.

Researchers found that those with hearing loss at the beginning of the study were much more likely to develop dementia by the end, even after taking into account age and other risk factors. The risk of dementia only began to rise once hearing loss began to interfere with the ability to communicate – for example, in a noisy restaurant. The study also found that hearing loss increased the risk of Alzheimer's disease, but the two were not as strongly linked as hearing loss and dementia.

"Though we don't know the exact reason for this connection, we do know that untreated hearing loss can compound the difficulties that people with dementia or Alzheimer's and their families already face," says Jim Wise, Ph.D., FAAA, president-emeritus, Associated Audiologists. "Fortunately, in many cases, the regular use of hearing aids



can benefit people with hearing loss, including those with dementia, Alzheimer's and their caregivers."

Earlier intervention may lead to better long-term outcomes with hearing aid use, especially if dementia progresses. "It is important to note that we have many excellent options for hearing devices that can help patients with limited cognitive ability and/or dexterity," Dr. Wise adds.

For example, one of the newest hearing aids is the Lyric, an extended-wear device that can be worn when showering, sleeping or talking on the phone, usually for up to four months at a time. The audiologist inserts and removes the device in the office, eliminating the need for the patient to remember to remove the device each day.

Additional studies are looking at whether hearing aids could actually reduce or delay the onset of dementia, a problem projected to affect one in 30 Americans by 2050.



For more information about hearing loss, visit [www.hearingyourbest.com](http://www.hearingyourbest.com).

## KanCare Update

Associated Audiologists, Inc. currently is not a provider for KanCare, the new Kansas Medicaid services health plan. To find an audiologist participating in the program, contact a care manager, or KanCare consumer assistance at 1-866-305-5147. We are able to do service on warrantied devices dispensed by the previous Medicaid program, as well as basic appointments. Minimum out-of-pocket fees apply.

## Wax Filter Fee

If you use wax filters for your hearing aids, please be aware that all filter packs are now \$5 regardless of the manufacturer. Recent changes in pricing from all manufacturers are the reason for the small fee. If you have a question about which filters are appropriate for your hearing aids, talk with your audiologist.

# Tinnitus Treatment Gives Miller His Life Back

**J**ust two years ago the simple pleasure of relaxing on a Sunday afternoon was nearly impossible for Kirby Miller. That's because the 50-year-old Lone Jack, Mo. man was suffering with tinnitus, a common condition that affects approximately 50 million Americans.

Tinnitus often is caused by damage to the nerve cells within the inner ear, resulting in a sound that only the individual can hear. Some people describe tinnitus as a buzzing, ringing, white noise or a roaring sound. Miller says his tinnitus sounded like crickets—very loud crickets. "Imagine hearing crickets non-stop, as long and as loud as you can stand it," Miller says. "That's what I heard all the time."

During the day, Miller tried playing the radio to drown out the noise, but that didn't work. Nighttime was even worse. "I couldn't sleep through the night. The chirping would wake me and I would have to get up and walk around. It was driving me crazy."

Though he sought help from several health professionals, Miller couldn't find relief. "Everyone I saw told me I just needed to learn to live with it," he says. But Miller's wife, Alinda, wouldn't give up on finding an effective treatment. "She started doing research on the internet and found that Dr. Flowers specializes in treating tinnitus," Miller explains. "I made an appointment to see her right away."

During his evaluation, Laura Flowers, Au.D., FAAA, a tinnitus and hyperacusis specialist with Associated Audiologists, discovered that not only

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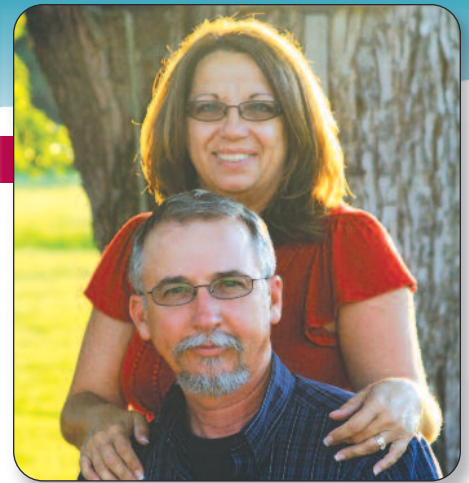
*"The change didn't happen overnight, but the tinnitus has improved significantly. Sleeping is no longer a problem."*

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did Miller have tinnitus, but he had a hearing loss. "It's very common for individuals with tinnitus to also have a hearing loss," Dr. Flowers says. "For some of these patients, hearing aids may provide an effective treatment for both problems."

"I have been around loud noises all my life—tractors, guns and loud music—and I didn't wear any hearing protection," Miller says. "I'm sure that contributed to the problem."

Dr. Flowers recommended Miller try a special hearing aid from Widex featuring the ZEN Program, a unique sound therapy tool that has shown promise in the treatment of tinnitus. "I have to be honest," Miller says, "at that point, I was skeptical that anything could help, but I agreed to give it a try."



*Kirby and Alinda Miller*

Dr. Flowers explained how the hearing aids and the ZEN Program worked, and that it could take time before he would see an improvement in the tinnitus. "To me, the ZEN Program sounds like wind chimes. It's not distracting. I could see a big improvement, even after just a couple of weeks," Miller says.

Over the next several months, Miller adjusted to the sound therapy program and his new hearing aids. "The change didn't happen overnight, but the tinnitus has improved significantly. Sleeping is no longer a problem." And, thanks to the hearing aids, he's enjoying sounds he hasn't heard in years. "When I was hunting, I could hear the turkeys gobbling in the distance. It was amazing. Before, all I would have heard was the tinnitus."

Miller credits Dr. Flowers with his successful treatment. "Her patience and the care she gave me were outstanding," he says. "She was very reassuring and provided me with the guidance to help me through this. I feel like I have my life back. It's such a blessing not to hear that roar in my ears anymore."

**Dr. Flowers** and **Susan Smittkamp, Au.D., Ph.D., FAAA**, are based at our Shawnee Mission office and **Samuel A. Gillespie, Au.D., FAAA**, at our Manhattan office. They specialize in treating tinnitus and sensitivity to sound.

To schedule an appointment with one of them at the Shawnee Mission office, call **913-403-0018**; in Manhattan call **785-539-7361**.

# HEARING YOUR BEST

## Bringing Looping Technology to a Family Room Near You!

If you're someone who has problems hearing the television at home, even when you're wearing your hearing aids, you may want to check into a home induction loop system.



This is the same technology used in looping systems installed in auditoriums, airports, theatres, and schools. It is simply scaled down for use in the home so you can hear the television or listen to music or the radio.

To take advantage of looping technology, you first need a hearing aid equipped with a telecoil. This is a specialized circuit placed within the hearing aid made up of a small coil of wire. This tiny wire is designed to pick up magnetic signals versus the acoustic signals the hearing aid microphone typically picks up.

Your audiologist can tell you if your hearing aids have telecoils. If so, induction loop technology can deliver sound directly to them, turning them into personal speakers/receivers. Induction loops broadcast sound as a magnetic

signal in the room only where the loop is present. The telecoil serves as the hearing aid's "antennae," receiving the magnetic signal.

The magnetic signal is the only sound the hearing aid user hears, not the background noise. This creates a crisper and clearer signal for the user and a more enjoyable listening experience. In addition, the hearing aid picks up the sound directly from the source, overcoming the effects of distance. Those who do not utilize hearing aids are unaffected and unaware of this transmission.

To loop a room in your house, the amplifier wire is installed around the outside edges of the room, either along the ceiling or close to the floor. Another option is to run the wire underneath the room, stapled onto the basement ceiling below.

Wherever it is installed, the wire is then attached to the television. The induction loop sends out a

sound signal that's picked up by the hearing aid telecoil, allowing you to hear the television directly through your hearing aids whenever you are in the room where the wire is installed.

The good news is these personal listening systems can be installed inexpensively and used to improve the quality of sound for all hearing aid users in the loop.

**Tammy Gonzales, Au.D., FAAA**, audiologist, serves as the practice's expert on looping systems. If you are interested in learning more about looping systems, talk with Dr. Gonzales or your audiologist. You are also welcome to visit the lobby of our Prairie Village, Shawnee Mission or Overland Park offices to experience a looping system first hand.

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## STAFF NEWS



**Congratulations to Sam Bittel, Au.D., FAAA**, who has recently been named Vestibular Program Director for Associated Audiologists. Dr. Bittel will oversee and manage our vestibular services at our Shawnee Mission and Overland Park offices.



**Tammy Gonzales, Au.D., FAAA**, is now seeing patients in our Manhattan office twice each month to diagnose and treat dizziness and balance problems. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Gonzales at that location, call 785-539-7361. Dr. Gonzales continues to see patients at our Overland Park and Shawnee Mission Vestibular Clinics with Dr. Bittel.

**Tim Steele, Ph.D., FAAA**, president of Associated Audiologists, has been notified his dissertation research is being considered for inclusion in The Cochrane Review published in The Cochrane Library. The library is an online collection of databases that bring together in one place rigorous and up-to-date research on the effectiveness of healthcare treatments and interventions, as well as methodology and diagnostic tests. Dr. Steele's research topic was, "Interventions to improve hearing aid use in adult auditory rehabilitation."



**Congratulations to Kelly Young**, administrative staff with our Manhattan office, and her husband, Scott Jury. The couple was married in February in a mountain man ceremony, wearing handmade traditional buckskins.



**For the latest news about the Associated Audiologists staff and what we're doing, be sure to like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/hearingyourbest](http://www.facebook.com/hearingyourbest).**

## Audiologists Provide Outreach Services to Communities

As an added convenience for our patients, Associated Audiologists provides services to several area living centers. Our schedule includes:

- > **Town Village**, second Wednesday of every other month, call 913-498-2827 to schedule.
- > **Tallgrass Creek**, first Thursday of each month by appointment. Call 913-498-2827 to schedule.
- > **Village Shalom**, third Tuesday of every month, sign up at Village Shalom.
- > **Brookdale Place** (previously Grand Court), fourth Thursday of every other month, sign up at Brookdale Place.
- > **Grace Gardens**, schedule as needed, call 913-498-2827 to schedule.
- > **Cedar Lake Village**, second Friday of each month, call 913-403-0018 to schedule.
- > **Lakeview Village**, second Friday of each month, call 913-403-0018 to schedule.
- > **Santa Marta**, fourth Friday of each month, call 913-403-0018 to schedule.
- > **Aberdeen Village**, fourth Friday of each month, call 913-403-0018 to schedule.
- > **Kansas School for the Deaf**, every other Tuesday during the school year, students contact Dr. Gail Sprecher.
- > **Shawnee Hills**, second Friday of every other month (April, June, August, October and December), sign up at Shawnee Hills.
- > **Twin Oaks Independent Living**, Leavenworth, June 26, Sept. 25 and Dec. 18, 4 to 5 p.m. Sign up at Twin Oaks.
- > **Twin Oaks Assisted Living**, Leavenworth, April 24, July 31 and Oct. 30, 4 to 5 p.m. Sign up at Twin Oaks.
- > **Homestead, Leavenworth**, May 29, Aug. 28 and Nov. 27, 4 to 5 p.m. Sign up at Homestead.



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Important  
information  
about hearing  
and balance  
health from your  
audiologist.

# HEARING YOUR BEST

## Associated Audiologists Celebrates Better Hearing and Speech Month



May is Better Hearing and Speech Month, first established in 1927 by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association as a time to raise awareness of hearing loss.

The National Institute on Deafness and Communicative Disorders estimates that approximately 15 percent (26 million) of Americans between the ages of 20 and 69 have high-frequency hearing loss due to exposure to loud sounds or noise at work or in leisure activities.



Today, we have a number of devices that can protect your hearing, from simple foam ear plugs to sophisticated, custom-made ear plugs for musicians. Talk with one of our audiologists about how you can protect your hearing now and in the future.

**We look forward to meeting your hearing and balance healthcare needs.**