

# Sound of happiness

After a lifetime of minimized hearing, Bozeman woman gets auditory boost

By JODI HAUSEN  
Chronicle Staff Writer

When audiologist Nathan Putnam turned on a small device attached to Sue Koslofsky's head Friday morning, she gasped. Then she began to cry.

Koslofsky, who has been deaf in her right ear for essentially her entire life, was hearing through it for the first time.

"Isn't that the coolest damn thing?" she said. "I'm so happy."

Koslofsky, 66, is thought to be the first patient in Gallatin County to receive the conductive hearing device called a Cochlear Baha, or bone-anchored hearing aid.

The small rectangular device snaps onto a post that was surgically implanted in Koslofsky's skull three months ago by ear, nose and throat specialist Dr. Brennan Dodson.

Koslofsky couldn't hear anything softer than 70 decibels, Dodson said. Most people speak at about 55 decibels or lower, he added.

Koslofsky got her first hearing aid when she was in her 40s. But because her middle ear was so damaged from near-constant infections as a child, merely amplifying sound through a hearing aid was ineffective.

Trying so hard to hear all the time was exhausting.

Now that her hearing is improved, Koslofsky won't have to try and put conversations into context based on the words she did hear.

Once she and a co-worker had a half-hour conversation before they realized one person was talking about an antique clock while the other was talking about a chopping block.

"It's been an interesting life," she said.

Koslofsky's Baha works differently than a hearing aid that simply increases volume or a cochlear implant that uses electrical impulses to send messages directly to the auditory nerve.

A Baha conducts vibrations through the bone of the skull, sending sound waves to a functioning inner ear. In the case of one-



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Sue Koslofsky, 66, who has been deaf in her right ear for most of her life, smiles through tears of happiness as she hears the first sounds out of her right ear with the help of a new hearing device on Friday morning.

-sided deafness, it can also conduct sound waves through the skull to the opposite fully functioning ear improving patients' understanding of people on their deaf side.

Similar to a dental implant, a 3-millimeter "snap" sticks out of Koslofsky's skull behind her right ear. It's a bit odd to see, but even with the device attached, it's unnoticeable under her blonde hair "that comes out of a bottle," she joked.

And she's been so excited about it, she's been showing it "to anyone who will look."

Bahas don't produce feedback and have microphones that automatically switch from picking up sound in all directions to focusing on sound in front of the wearer in noisier situations -- something Koslofsky was excited about.

In the past, if someone asked her where a noise came from, she'd laugh and say, "I'm not the one to ask," she said.

After adjusting the device and showing Koslofsky some of the details of caring for

and using it, Putnam seemed pleased.

"You know what's amazing?" he said. "You haven't missed a word of this conversation."

"You're right," Koslofsky said.

And though she will probably continue to read lips -- she's been doing it her whole life, after all -- she really won't need to.

What she's really looking forward to, however, is being able to hear conversations on the golf links.

"I want to be able to hear what my friends are saying across the fairway," she said. "Now they'll have to be nice."

And as she put her jacket on to leave Putnam's office Friday, Koslofsky noticed something else.

"Oh, I just heard fabric rustle," she said. "I just don't have the words to describe my joy," she added.

Jodi Hausen can be reached at [jhausen@dailychronicle.com](mailto:jhausen@dailychronicle.com) or 582-2630. Follow her on Twitter @JodiHausen.