



Top athlete scores victory over hearing loss

Meet 32-year-old New Zealander Vesna Aroha Radonich. She is a world-recognized champion waka ama paddler (outrigger canoe racing). But her biggest victory was over her ears.

Born with profound hearing loss, Vesna's condition wasn't immediately diagnosed. She was a shy, introverted girl who couldn't speak well and had to lip-read to understand others. At the time, it seemed that the only ones in the world who knew about her deafness were her kindergarten buddies, who knew to tap her on the shoulder if they wanted her attention to talk to her. Vesna was a little girl in dire need of big help to ensure a successful life ahead.

Finally, after three years, her ears were evaluated and profound hearing loss was correctly diagnosed. Behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing instruments and speech therapy were prescribed, and her world and outlook instantly became brighter. Suddenly, she was hearing

sounds she'd never heard before. She joined the Brownies and the Air Training Corps (similar to our Junior ROTC in the U.S.), rose up the ranks, and her confidence soared.

In July 2008, Vesna was fitted for new and modern hearing instruments, the Siemens Centra Active® model, provided to her by Siemens New Zealand and fitted by Bay Audiology, Parnell. These hearing instruments feature Nanocoating which makes them resistant to moisture and perspiration, suitable for her racing.

Vesna wore the Siemens Centra Active hearing instruments during the World Waka Ama Sprint Championships, during which she won a Bronze

"Hearing aids have made a huge difference in my life; they were a real confidence-builder. I pulled my hair back and tucked it behind my ears. I faced the world with the willingness to try anything and succeed. My parents always encouraged me to believe in myself and to follow my dreams; which is exactly what I have done. There really is so much you can do, if you just try."

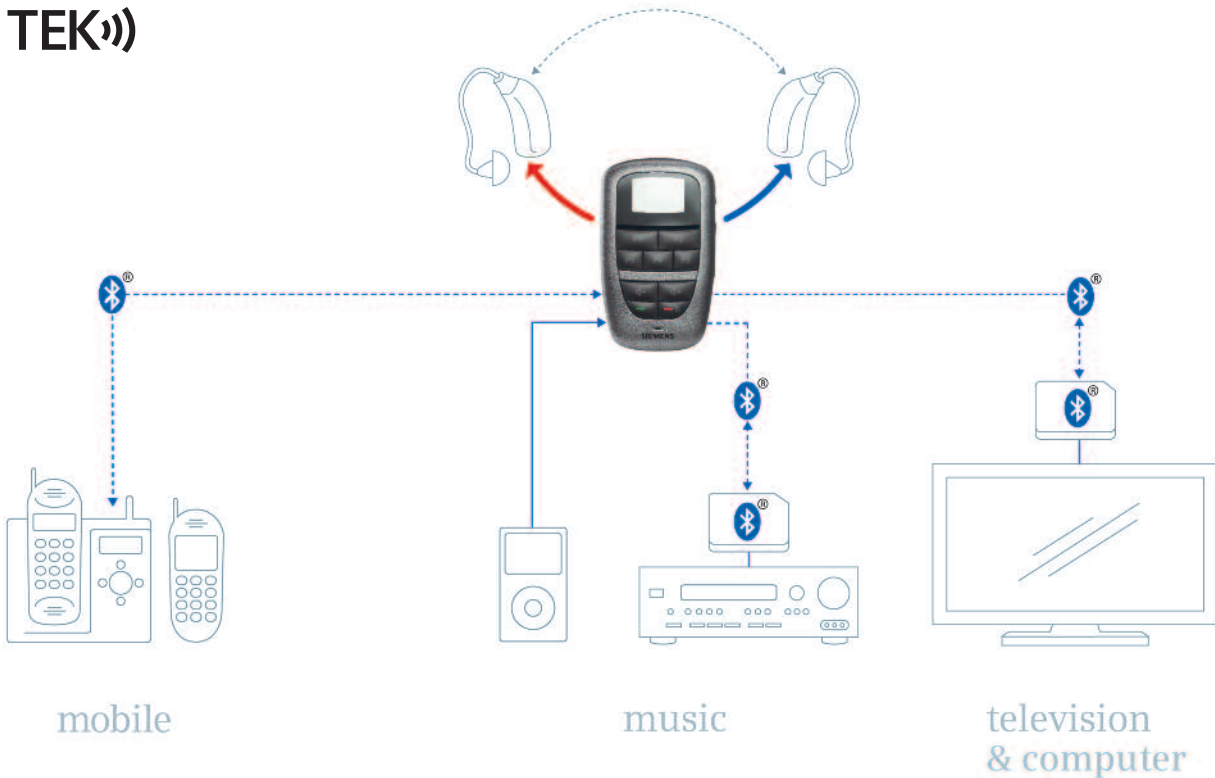
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Vesna can use the new Tek™ wireless enhancement with *Bluetooth*® wireless technology to answer her cell phone, watch TV, and listen to stereo MP3 music directly through her Siemens Pure® hearing instruments.

TEK)))



Medal. For the first time with her team events, she was able to hear all the sounds of competition, the cheers of the onlookers, and most important of all the race calls from her teammates while competing.

"The new hearing aids were amazing with their sharpness and ability to pick up all the voice commands of my teammates. Now, I can respond faster and get results more quickly. This can make the difference between third place and no place at all."

Today, Vesna is setting up a new business in New Zealand called Waka Ama Tours (<http://www.wakaamatours.com>). There, she will utilize her many paddling skills and international achievements in offering others the opportunity to experience NZ fastest growing water sport, waka ama (outriggers). This is alongside her personal training business Activate Your Life (www.activateyourlife.co.nz) that provides personal fitness coaching, sports-specific motivational training, and personal development. She specializes in the elderly, special needs and rehabilitation.

Encouraging younger people with hearing loss

Now, with a business in addition to professional racing to keep her busy, she has only one more burning ambition:

This past summer, while Vesna was in California in advance of a big race, representatives of Siemens Hearing Instruments in New Jersey requested a chance to speak with her about her experience with the Siemens product. Vesna agreed. During the conversation, Vesna mentioned that certain sounds seemed too loud to her, and it was recommended that she make time to visit an audiologist in Sacramento to make some minor adjustments. Vesna readily agreed, and she was put in touch with a Siemens representative from California, who would later drive her to Avalon Hearing for the appointment.

Before the conference call with Siemens Hearing Instruments in New Jersey was over, Vesna was

informed of new hearing technologies that had been developed by Siemens. Vesna was told that now, with the recently released new Siemens Pure® hearing instrument, she could utilize the new Tek™ wireless enhancement with Bluetooth® wireless technology to answer her cell phone, watch TV, and listen to stereo MP3 music via her hearing instruments.

Would she be interested in test-driving the Pure? Vesna thought that would be amazing. Arrangements were made for Vesna to be fitted for the Pure while she was in Sacramento.

After the adjustments to the Centra Active hearing instruments were made, the excited look on Vesna's face told the story. Her results went from 56% understanding to about 77%. Then, Vesna was fitted with the new Pure 700 BTE instruments, and her understanding shot up to 84%. Vesna could not have been happier.

Here, from an email by the Siemens California representative—who also wears Pure hearing instruments—is what happened next:

"The really neat part of the Pure fitting was adding the Tek wireless enhancement and using the Tek Connect remote. We were both wearing our Pure instruments and when we attached the MP3 player, Vesna went through my song list. My 14-year-old son had added the theme song from the movie 'Iron Man'

by Black Sabbath. It was one of Vesna's favorite songs! It came on in both our hearing instruments, simultaneously, and we were rocking out. It was really funny. At one point after listening to one of her other favorites, she just broke down crying, she was so happy. More so blown away by the generosity of Siemens USA.

"We later went for a bite to eat. She did fantastically well with her Pure hearing instruments in the noisy restaurant. We had a wonderful conversation with no adjustments to our aids. Later, I could tell she was tired. I asked how she was doing and her words were, 'balanced, relaxed, amazed, overwhelmed' to name a few."

Vesna continues to be surprised by her own ears

As of this writing, Vesna is home in New Zealand, planning the upcoming year in racing and laying down plans for her business. She continues to be overwhelmed and surprised by her own ears.

"I can hear in all directions and at great distances I never have before...I have real time hearing now... I can hear my coach and not have to return to the beach for instructions from him, I can hear him out on the water for the first time...Now, I don't have to sit up front at lectures or classes anymore. I can sit wherever I like!"

"I want to help and encourage young people with hearing loss, and their parents too. There is so much you can do in life, and one reason you might think you can't is because you're scared of failure. Fear goes away with knowledge, so I tell anyone who has any kind of doubt about their hearing or what's going on with them to have your ears checked by an audiologist. Who knows, it could revolutionize your life. It did mine!"





3 lessons learned from Vesna's victorious experience

1. Have your hearing checked regularly.

As you've learned from Vesna, diagnosing a hearing loss can be a life-changing event—for the better—especially for children whose lives can be altered by what they can't hear.

2. Be aware of changes to your body before an exam.

One of Vesna's earlier audiograms showed an incorrect result. The audiologist didn't know that Vesna had a sinus infection and had just gotten out of the pressurized cabin of an airplane before he gave the hearing exam. Hearing fluctuates like your blood pressure, and many things can affect this. So be sure to tell your hearing care professional everything you can.

3. Too much of a good thing.

If you will be a first-time wearer of hearing instruments, follow Vesna's example and be patient and practice getting used to all the new sounds and new reactions you will have. Enjoy yourself as you add new sounds to the hearing vocabulary in your brain!

But as most new wearers will tell you, it isn't always the big changes that are the most amazing.

"It's also little things. For instance, when I was home, I heard this odd sound and said 'What's that?' As it turned out, I'd hit a bottle with my foot, but it was a sound I'd never heard before. Like cell phone buttons. New sounds. My parents test me on sounds, because I haven't heard them before. What's this? What's that? I feel like I'm five years old! It's like I'm building a new vocabulary of hearing for my brain—it's a whole new dictionary of sound for me."

We know from Vesna's saga that she did not allow hearing loss to stand in the way of her dreams and ambitions. This is true—but she didn't do it alone. She never would have had the opportunity and confidence to succeed if it were not for that first successful hearing check and her first hearing instruments.

The impact of hearing loss

Now, Vesna realizes even more just how profoundly hearing loss can affect one's life and even a person's personality, after her own father was diagnosed with hearing loss and received his first pair of hearing instruments.

"Since my father got hearing instruments, he's become much softer, much more affectionate. Maybe not hearing well had made him sad. Maybe he had been a hard man because he couldn't hear. This is beautiful. It is from transformations like that where I get my determination from."

So, none of us, or our children, should hesitate to ask the right questions and have your hearing checked. It's the only sure way to a sound future. Make today your future tomorrow.

"A big thank you goes to the support of my family, partner (Allan), fellow paddlers, and people I surround myself with. My parents have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and live with passion, which is what I do everyday. I am so grateful for everything I have in my life and so grateful for the opportunities that come my way, especially through Siemens."

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