



shire audiology and hearing aid services

Dining out

Tips for the person with the hearing loss

Noisy restaurants are one of the most difficult listening situations for people with a hearing loss. Restaurant noise tends to be lower pitch, whereas most hearing losses tend to be in the higher pitches. This leaves the person with a hearing loss little sound input to work with.

Control your listening environment

Restaurants more conducive to conversation have:

- smaller rooms rather than a large open plan dining room; and
- sound absorbing décor such as carpeting, curtains, cushioned chairs, cloth tablecloths and acoustic tiles.

Avoid restaurants with:

- hard surfaces such as wooden or tiled floors and tiled areas; and
- music or TV playing through speakers.

Choose to sit:

- at a corner table or along a wall or at a booth with high-backed seats as there is a barrier between you and the rest of the noise (this also reduces distractions from the noise behind you and allows you to focus on the speakers at the table);
- away from high traffic areas such as the entrance or kitchen; and
- in an area that has good lighting so you may clearly see your companions' face/s.

Visit restaurants during off-peak hours, especially if you are visiting a crowded and noisy restaurant. Plan early when you make the booking and explain you want to have a quiet table.

Listener

Active listening - being present in the moment - is important in restaurants. Become familiar with your surroundings that may become a topic of the conversation. Know the menu and specials before you go to the restaurant. If you are with a group, try to concentrate on one conversation at a time and sit next to the person you most want to converse with. Hopefully this person will provide you with clarifications of other conversations if needed. To listen actively try to "tune out" noises (silverware clanking, babies crying, people laughing etc) not helpful for your conversation so you may focus fully on the conversation at your table. When you first get hearing aids this can be difficult but should become easier.

Technology

It is important to wear your hearing aids in the restaurant as it will be the most difficult environment for you to adapt to. Hearing aids will not be able to know whether you want to hear people talking to you from your front-left or your front-right. Hearing aids are designed to pick up speech and some people talk louder than others. If a person at a neighbouring table has a louder voice the hearing aids will pick up on that rather than your softly spoken dinner companion. You need to choose to focus on your companion's voice rather than those at other tables. This skill will get easier with time and practice.

If your hearing aids have wireless compatibility they will be able to be used with a companion microphone which can make hearing conversation at your dinner table much easier. The companion microphone can be attached to your partner's shirt and only be tuned to pick up the voice of this speaker. If you are dining with a group the microphone can be placed at the far end of the table to make it easier to hear speakers farther away.

Improving understanding while dining out

Tips for family or significant others

Noisy restaurants are one of the most difficult listening situations for people with a hearing loss. The following suggestions will help your friend or family member .

Discuss menu with beforehand to provide clarification.

Position yourself so they can see your face clearly and face them directly when you are speaking.

Ensure there is good lighting where you are seated and the lighting is not shining directly into your friend's eyes.

Avoid talking with food in your mouth, or with anything covering your mouth such as your hands or a napkin.

Try to keep side conversations to a minimum as it is very difficult for people with a hearing loss to follow multiple conversations.

Get your friend's attention before you start speaking by tapping them on her shoulder or calling her by their name.

Speak slowly (but not in an exaggerated way!), distinctly and directly to them.

If your friend misses part of the conversation, rephrase what was said rather than repeating the same words over again.

Try to avoid changing topics suddenly or alert your friend to a change in topic.