

HEARING AND NOISE

It's a noisy world out there. Even with normal hearing we struggle to hear well in noisy restaurants and cafes, but if you have a hearing loss then this problem becomes greatly compounded.

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Basic hearing tactics for noise:

Any action which improves signal to noise ratio will assist hearing in noise, where the signal is the speech you want to hear and the noise is the competing background noise level. Simply moving away from noise or reducing unnecessary noise while conversing, such as turning off the TV or radio, will improve the signal to noise ratio.

Roughly 15 per cent of the speech we "hear" actually comes from lip-reading. So focusing on the lips and facial expressions will help you hear better in noise. Also our outer ear or pinna is designed in a way to enhance speech detection. In noise you can accentuate this feature by cupping one or preferably both hands behind your ears... notice the improvement.

Tips for restaurants and cafes:

Sadly not enough attention is paid by owners of restaurants and cafes to minimise noise levels. Simple solutions like acoustic paneling, tablecloths, soft or carpeted floors and monitoring ambient background music levels make for a far more enjoyable social and dining experience. Here are some

suggestions to minimise the effect of noise;

- Check reviews of restaurants online and if words like noisy, lively or bustling get mentioned it might be worth booking elsewhere.
- Check the restaurant's website for photos of the interior. Bare walls and floors and lots of glass suggest that the venue will be noisy and best avoided.
- When booking request a quiet table or at least when being seated ask not to be seated near speakers, open kitchens or coffee grinders.
- Avoid dark restaurants as they make lip reading much harder.
- Finally, if noise is an issue let the manager know as this may prompt them to turn down the music or better still prompt some redesign initiatives.

Hearing aid technology and noise:

No hearing aid, no matter how expensive or whatever a glossy advertising brochure may say, will allow you to hear perfectly in high levels of noise. However, modern digital aids have three key features that can



help. First, a directional microphone system which can suppress noise from behind and the sides, effectively zooms in on what you want to hear. Try cupping both hands behind your ears next time you are in noise to simulate the effect. Secondly, a speech and noise management algorithm within an aid reduces the effort of understanding speech in noise. The noise reduction system analyses the temporal pattern or modulation of the incoming sound to determine whether speech or noise is the dominating signal in each frequency channel. Finally, transient noise reduction features in hearing aids specifically target impulsive and abrupt noises like rustling paper or clanging dishes without affecting speech detection.

Hearing is important to a healthy relationship, a good social experience and more broadly your quality of life. For more information or to make an appointment contact the Bendigo Hearing Clinic on (03) 5442 5800 or visit

www.bendigohearingclinic.com.au ■

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