

Successfully Dining Out with Hearing Loss

Possibly the most challenging communication environment presents itself when we are conversing while out to dinner. The clatter of dishes, the conversations at surrounding tables, the hustle and bustle of the restaurant staff, all contribute to a defeating noise level for those with hearing loss.

If truth be known, restaurant noise levels can be daunting at times for those with normal hearing. Indeed, some restaurants are designed for high noise levels to create a party atmosphere for the young crowd. Clearly these are the types of restaurants to be avoided. But beyond that, there are things you can do to help ensure more pleasant dining and more successful dinner conversations.

The Restaurant of Choice

Correct selection of dining local is as important as a good selection from the menu if the meal is to be enjoyed. Choose restaurants that are designed to absorb noise. Restaurants with more widely spaced tables, carpeting, softer fabric covered furniture and curtains will avoid the reverberation common to restaurants with harder surfaces.

As in most things in life, Timing is Critical

Avoid dining out at peak times when crowds are thick and noise is high. Departure for your favorite restaurant at 4:30 in the afternoon will put dinner on the table no earlier than 5:15 – a suitable dinner time for many. It may seem early, but if it means the difference between an enjoyable outing and an unbearable excursion, it may be a worthy compromise to consider.

Proper Seating

Where you sit in a restaurant can make or break an evening out. Inform the hostess that you have difficulty hearing and request a table in a quieter area of the restaurant – away from exits and high traffic areas. It is often advantageous for those with hearing loss to sit with their backs to a wall to avoid additional noise distractions coming from behind. If, however, you have advanced hearing aids with directional microphones to squelch sounds from behind and to the side, you should sit with the greatest amount of noise behind you.

Placing your Order

When entering the restaurant check the posted listing of the specials for the evening. If they are not posted, ask the hostess for a written description of the specials before your waitress arrives to take your order. And don't hesitate to inform your waitress of your hearing difficulties. This person wants to know what can be done to make your evening more enjoyable. The tip you leave is riding on this, and the waitperson knows it.

Coping with Large Groups

Dining with smaller, more intimate groups can lead to much greater ease in following dinner conversations. If you find yourself out with a large group, try concentrating on the conversation with the people next to you or across from you. Recognize that there will be limitations to what you can hear. It may be entirely too difficult to hear a person at the other end of the table. If you know the limitations, you can avoid much frustration trying to overcome the impossible.

Remember, with a little pre-planning many of the frustrations that lead to communication failure in difficult listening environments can be eliminated or reduced. Give some advanced thought to your next outing and enjoy the meal and your companions.

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