

## Hearing Loss: Active Listening Strategies

If you experience hearing loss or have borderline normal hearing however still struggle to understand what people are saying to you, the following active listening strategies should help enhance your communication with other people. This advice is necessary to create a more positive communicative environment than hearing aids alone can provide.

### **Look at the person who is speaking and ensure you are wearing glasses if you need them**

A lot of information can be obtained by watching as well as by listening; therefore it is important that you position yourself to get a full view of the face, not just a profile view. Although no one can gain all of the information by sight alone, everyone has some lip-reading ability; but we also obtain important cues from facial expressions, gestures, body language, etc.

### **Don't be afraid that people will think you are staring at them**

While you are trying to understand what they are saying it is always polite to look at the person who is talking.

### **Reduce the distance between you and the person talking and avoid carrying on conversations from another room**

The ideal distance for listening is between three and five feet, listening around corners is a problem for anyone.

### **Maximize the use of lighting**

Have the light behind you, not behind the speaker where it may cast a shadow and make lip-reading impossible.

### **Try to reduce or eliminate interfering background noise**

This includes turning down or off the television, radio, running water or fan while conversing. In a social setting or restaurant, you may want to find a quieter corner away from the noise for your conversations.

### **If you are in a room with an open door or window (such as when in a car) facing a noisy or busy area, close it**

### **When going to a restaurant, try to make plans in advance**

Go during off-peak hours, reserve a table in a quiet corner and sit with your back against the wall. Request a booth if available.

### **If one ear is better than the other, ensure the person you have most difficulty listening to is sat on that side**

### **Maintain realistic expectations about what you will be able to hear in various situations and environments**

There will be some situations where listening will be more difficult, and you will need to use more effort and strategies to follow what has been said. Remember that this is true for listeners with very good hearing, as well.

### **Check the situation in public places before blaming your hearing loss**

Find out if others are having difficulty too. It may be due to a faulty public address (PA) system, a poor speaker, or high levels of background noise.

### **Be willing to acknowledge your hearing loss and ask for help**

Most reasonable people will be glad to help if your request is specific and if they know how to improve communication.

### **Tell the speaker if something they are doing is affecting your ability to understand them**

Merely saying, "I didn't hear," or "I didn't understand," doesn't give the speaker the necessary information to correct your problem. Tell them if they are speaking too softly, too rapidly, if their hand is in front of their mouth or if background noise is preventing you from understanding. Inform them of the importance of speaking more slowly, making sure that they are close to and facing you, as well as using facial expressions and gestures to get the message across. Many people are embarrassed because they have no idea how to talk to people with hearing difficulties. Put them at ease and assure them that natural, unexaggerated speech is the easiest for you to understand.

### **Concentrate on the thought or ideas that the speaker is expressing**

Straining to understand every word that is said is exhausting. Don't get discouraged or give up if you miss a few words. Remember some of what is said is unimportant in following the conversation.

### **Try to be aware of the topic of conversation and environmental cues**

Knowing the topic will help us make educated guesses. Helpful friends can be coached to give occasional leads about the subject being discussed. They can unobtrusively say "We are discussing the housing problem" or you can alternatively ask someone in the group to tell you what is being discussed "What are you talking about?"

### **Maintain an active interest in people and events.**

Knowledge about national, regional or world affairs will help you to follow many discussions or conversations more easily.

### **Don't bluff and nod as if you understand when you don't**

It is better to ask questions than to continue along the wrong path.

### **Don't hesitate to ask someone to clarify information you may have missed**

In order to reduce frustration on both sides, it is helpful to be very specific about what you have missed so that the person does not have to repeat the whole message. You may also want to ask the person not just to repeat the information, but also to rephrase it so that words you have difficulty hearing can be replaced with words that are easier to hear.

### **Work at listening**

Don't get into the habit of allowing someone else, such as your spouse or friend, to listen for you. Remember that conversation is a two-way interaction. Do not monopolize it in an attempt to direct and control it. Listening takes more energy than talking.

### **Whenever possible, ask for specifics such as directions or medical information, in writing**

**When going to a movie or play, read the reviews or a summary of the plot in advance.**

**When attending lectures, request that speakers use microphones or FM systems if these are available and ensure you sit at the front of the room**

**When taking information over the telephone, repeat back what you heard to verify that it was correct**

### **Relax and avoid tension**

Recognize that illness and fatigue will make listening more difficult. Allow yourself the luxury of withdrawing at times. Try to relax and keep your sense of humour. Tension interferes significantly with the ability to listen and it drains energy. It is not possible for even the best of listeners to hear everything.

Information taken from the University of California Medical Centre website  
([http://www.ucsfhealth.org/adult/medical\\_services/audio/hearingloss/activeListening.html](http://www.ucsfhealth.org/adult/medical_services/audio/hearingloss/activeListening.html))