

Improving the Listening Environment

Improving the listening environment will allow you to understand speech more easily. Here are some tips to improve your listening environment:

- **Reduce or remove noise:**
Identify sources of background noise such as traffic noise from windows, air conditioning units, and background music. Remove or reduce the sources of the noise where possible. For example, close the windows or turn off music and the tv/radio when you aren't using them. When in public (e.g. restaurants), position yourself away from noise sources to make communicating easier.
- **Reduce distance:**
Moving closer to the person speaking with you will make it easier for you to hear and understand what they are saying. Position yourself at the front of lecture halls, or closest to the main speaker in meetings.
- **Lighting:**
If the person you are speaking with is in front of a light source such as a window, it will make lip reading difficult, as a shadow will be cast over their face. Ask to move to a different space or swap seats, so that you can lip read more easily.
- **Echo (reverberation):**
Echoes are caused when sound waves bounce off hard surfaces. Sound in large spaces with high ceilings and hard flooring will echo far more than in small spaces with soft furnishings. Echoes will make listening more challenging as it adds to background noise. To reduce echoes, add soft furnishings like rugs, curtains and cushions to your home. Ask your workplace to install carpets/mats to improve your work listening environment too.
- **Use Assistive Listening Devices:**
Ask your Audiologist/Clinical Specialist about which Assistive Listening Devices will best suit your lifestyle and device. Connect to FM radio aids or wireless systems to allow for easier listening in challenging environments.

Communication Strategies

Here are some strategies you, as a cochlear implant recipient, can use right away to help make your conversations more successful:

Advocate for yourself:

- Inform those you are speaking with about your hearing loss
- Explain to them what they can do to help you to understand e.g. 'please face me when speaking so I can lip read', 'please talk at a normal speed and volume', 'Let's move away from the noise so I can hear you more clearly'
- Predict challenges and plan. Ask for tables away from music when there is music playing at cafes/restaurants, sit where you will be able to best see all of the people you are speaking with e.g. at meetings/restaurants. Ask whether hearing loops/telecoil facilities are available in public places e.g. cinema, train station, university.

Use clarification strategies to allow you to check what was said or gain more information. There are a number of ways to do this. Asking someone to repeat – "Please say that again" may not always be the most helpful strategy. Here are some more ideas:

- Elaborate "What do you mean by 'catch a flick?'"
- Provide a keyword "Are you talking about a movie? Which movie?" or "Did you say 'Let's meet at 2 o'clock?'"
- Change delivery "Could you say that a little slower please."
- Rephrase "Please say that a different way"
- Simplify "Can you say that in a simpler way?"

Be assertive! Use clarification strategies when someone (inadvertently) speaks in a way that makes it difficult for you to understand or when the environment is challenging. Identify the problem (what is making communication difficult?) and correct it, e.g. move to another room or reduce the background noise.

Communication Strategies for Your Communication Partner(s)

Here are some strategies to talk with your family and friends about. These are ideas for what they can do to help you communicate more effectively with each other:

- Be aware of noise and distance: Noise and distance will make understanding speech more difficult. Move away from noise sources when conversing. Reduce noise whenever possible.
- Get your attention before speaking.
- Indicate changes in conversation so you can follow the conversation easily.
- Ensure their face is clearly visible and positioned in light so it is easy to lip read and gain cues from facial expressions.
- Use and practice clarification strategies (listed above).
- Attend rehabilitation/therapy together to learn how they can help you practice auditory training at home.
- Help improve the listening environment at home and when out and about.