

# HEARING NEWS



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Speech & Hearing Associates  
121 South Euclid Avenue  
Westfield, NJ 07090-2129  
Phone: 908-232-2900  
Fax: 908-232-3583

***“An estimated 31 million people suffer from hearing loss, and that number grows considerably every year! There is not an exact statistic since many people either do not realize or refuse to admit that they are not hearing as well as they were once able to.”***

## Noise and Hearing

Ask new hearing aid users what the number one thing is that they like about their new hearing aids and the answer will probably be something similar to, “I don’t have to strain so much to hear anymore!” Ask them what the number one thing is that they don’t like and they will probably say, “I can’t stand the background noise. It’s driving me crazy!” There have been tremendous advances in hearing aid technology. However, even with the latest digital noise reduction circuitry, background noise continues to be a problem.

The definition of problematic background noise is any noise that interferes with your ability to hear, understand, and/or pay attention to the signal that you want to hear. Background noise includes sounds such as traffic noise, music, a marching band; reverberation, which causes sounds to echo when they are reflected off of room surfaces; voices such as children playing and laughing, several people talking at once, or even one person talking in a way that prevents or distracts you from listening to a signal you want to hear, usually another talker.

For new hearing aid users, background noises can be particularly bothersome and annoying during the first few weeks because it may have been a long time since they heard everyday noises such as screeching breaks, clattering dishes and rustling papers. Most long-time hearing aid users will tell you that the sudden ability to hear annoying noises loud and clear is challenging, but that it does get better with time. Remember, you probably have not been hearing much background noise since the onset of your gradual hearing loss. Many hearing care professionals actually use a special test to measure your perceived annoyance level of noise both with and without hearing instruments.

Experienced hearing aid user or not, there are at least two ways noise can affect you. First, it can make it nearly impossible to understand what someone is saying because the noise is louder than the signal you want to hear. Second, noise may be a problem because it distracts you from what the speaker is saying. That is why even a softer voice than the person you are trying to hear can be a problem. It may take your attention away from the main source you need to listen to. Although there is no cure for the problems that hearing aid users often

experience with distracting noises, there are some options that may at least lessen problems with background noise. These include use of:

- Two hearing aids, rather than just one
- Hearing aids with digital noise reduction
- Hearing aids with a directional microphone option
- FM technology
- Communication strategies
- Computer-based auditory training

Your hearing care professional is well versed on all aspects of communication in noise.

## 10 Tips for Better Hearing in Noise

Listening in the presence of background noise is one of the most difficult environments individuals with hearing loss encounter. As a matter of fact, even individuals with normal hearing experience difficulty hearing in noise. The next time you encounter one of these difficult situations, try a few of the following tips.

1. Arrange the room so you are no more than 3 to 6 feet from the speaker.
2. Face the speaker so you are able to see his or her facial expression and body language.
3. Position yourself so the sun is not in your eyes.
4. Position yourself so you have enough light to see the speaker's face.
5. Move to an area of the room away from distracting noise (i.e. kitchen of a restaurant).
6. If you are in a large group, hold conversations at the edge of the group rather than in the middle of the hubbub.
7. If possible, choose locations that are acoustically treated. Rooms with carpet, ceiling tile, low ceilings, drapes and over-stuffed furniture help absorb sound, making it easier to hear.
8. Eliminate any non-essential background noise (i.e. television, radios, fans, etc.).
9. Tell your communication partner you are having difficulty hearing. There is a good chance they are too!
10. Most importantly, relax!

The next time you are at a group function or eating out in a restaurant do the following exercise. On a scale of 0 to 100, rate the percent of the conversation you feel you are hearing, and then ask your companion to rate how much of the conversation they are picking up. You may be surprised just how closely the two of you rate your abilities.

## Signs of Hearing Loss

Take this quiz to discover whether or not you are experiencing signs of hearing loss:

- Do you often miss certain words?
- Do you frequently ask the speaker to repeat what was said?
- Have family members or friends expressed concern about your hearing?
- Do you avoid certain social situations (the theater, restaurants) because it is difficult to hear?
- Do you have a history of work-related noise exposure?
- Do you have difficulty understanding telephone conversations?
- Do you turn up the radio or television to volume levels that are too loud for others?
- Do you have difficulty following conversations in groups or in the presence of background noise?
- Do you experience ringing or buzzing sounds in one or both ears?



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