



Arlene Romoff

Tips from Arlene...

The holiday season can be very stressful for someone with a hearing loss. With large family groups gathering, laughing and conversing, it's easy for someone with a hearing loss to feel left out, isolated, bewildered and sad. Hearing aids and cochlear implants have limitations in noisy environments like this, so here are a few tips to help make this holiday more enjoyable for everyone.

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Seven Tips to Better Communication

1. Realize that large social groups, especially around a large dining room table, are one of the most difficult environments for a person with a hearing loss.

Be kind to yourself. Focus on the positive things that you can do, and not on the negatives of what you have difficulty doing. Think the glass is half full, not half empty.

2. It's easier to talk with people one-on-one in a quiet environment than in a noisy living room. So:

- Find a favorite friend or relative, and move the conversation into a quiet room, or a quieter corner. Or play a game or read a story to a child, if that's an option.
- Help out in the kitchen where there are usually less people gathered. And if you help with some preparations, you'll be doing something besides trying to hear.

3. When sitting down to dinner, make sure you choose a seat that is best for you! Here are some seating suggestions:

- If you have a "better side," seat yourself so that most people are on that side.
- Seat yourself next to a person you usually have the least difficulty hearing or lipreading (avoid those folks with bushy mustaches and beards!)
- Seat yourself next to someone who usually has the patience to clue you in on what the conversation is about, or the punch lines you'll miss.
- Try not to seat yourself facing a window because the glare could make it difficult to see people's faces.
- Ask your host to turn off any background music during dinner. And if a football game is blaring from a TV, turn it off or if that's not an option, set it on mute.
- Remember to be assertive about your needs! Pleasant and polite, but assertive!

4. Conversation tips:

- It's inevitable that you will not be able to hear the conversation with many people talking and laughing at once. Content yourself with speaking with the people on either side of you.
- If you start a conversation, then you'll know what the topic is, so it will be easier to follow.
- If you miss something, try to ask only for the part you missed, instead of just saying "what?"
- Expect that there will be jokes that you will not hear, so you will find yourself sitting at a table where everyone is laughing except you. Stay calm—you have a few options:
 - ask the person next to you to tell you what was so funny
 - ask the person next to you to remember what was so funny so they can tell you later.
 - say "excuse me" to everyone at the table, and ask for the joke to be repeated so you can get it too.Remember that if you do this with a pleasant attitude, then people will usually want to help you out.

5. After-dinner strategies:

- Volunteer to help out in the kitchen to get yourself away from that dining table with all the conversations and jokes you're having trouble following. **Do not** offer to wash the dishes! This will put your back to everyone in the kitchen and you won't be able to lipread. Offer to dry the dishes or put food away. Or just keep everyone company.
- Offer to wash the dishes if you want to take time out from trying to hear everyone, and you still want to feel useful.

6. To drink or not to drink?

Some people's lipreading skills tend to get worse when they drink. Some people's lip-reading skills tend to get better when they drink because they're more relaxed. And, of course, there are pros and cons of drinking that impact on mood. Be aware of what works best for you. And remember, if you do drink, do so responsibly and never drink and drive.

7. Assistive listening devices

There are assistive listening devices, such as personal amplifiers and auxiliary microphones that can help you hear in noisy environments. These can work either in conjunction with your hearing aid or cochlear implant, or directly into your ears. They have been particularly helpful for older relatives who are left out of the loop in large family gatherings. If you need more information about these devices, please ask us!

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season!

Arlene Romoff is the author of the book Hear Again: Back to Life with a Cochlear Implant (League for the Hard of Hearing Publications, NYC) and president of the HLA-New Jersey State Association. This November she was honored by Theatre Resources Unlimited for her work in getting open captioning for live theater performances. She lives in Saddle River, New Jersey, with her husband Ira.