

Communication strategies for better understanding

Not all cochlear implant users experience the same difficulties when listening and holding conversations. The following strategies may help you to overcome some of the problems that you may encounter when you are using your implant.

1. Use your eyes

Make sure that you are able to see the face of the person you are talking to. Part of the conversation may be heard with the cochlear implant and part of it you may be able to lipread or deduce from facial expression.

Try to position yourself so that the light falls on the speaker's face. Explain to people who are talking to you that it helps to be able to see them when they are talking.

It will be extremely difficult for you to understand what someone is saying if they are talking to you from another room.

2. Hearing Tactics

Ask the speaker to speak clearly and naturally to you. Shouting and exaggerating lip movements will not be helpful. You may need to explain this to people who are not used to talking to people with a hearing loss.

If you have not understood what someone has said to you, ask the person to repeat it. Avoid guessing what someone has said, this will only lead to confusion.

If the speaker has repeated a phrase a few times ask them to rephrase what they are saying.

If you are unable to understand a keyword in a sentence, such as a date or name, ask the speaker to spell the word for you or write it down.

If someone is speaking at a distance from you, try to move closer to him or her. It will be easier for you to hear and lipread if you are closer to the source of sound.

3. Helping others to help you

Be prepared to tell people that you may have difficulty hearing with your cochlear implant in certain situations, especially in background noise. Explain to people what makes it difficult for you to hear, for example, background noise, how quickly they are speaking and whether they are looking at you as they speak. Try to encourage people to catch your attention before they start talking to you.

Good communication needs both the speaker and the cochlear implant user to help each other to understand what the difficulties are. If you can explain to people what helps you to understand, conversations will be more rewarding. In any conversation, the speaker needs some feedback from the listener to show that they understand. You can nod or comment to show that you are able to follow. If you are unable to follow, you should let people know that you do not understand (e.g. ask for a repeat or a rephrase).

When the speaker is giving you important information, it may be necessary to check that you have the correct information by saying, “Did you say Tuesday 26th July?”, rather than saying “What” or “Pardon” all the time.

Do not expect to hear or lipread every word that is spoken. You may be able to pick up key words in a sentence that will help you to grasp the speaker’s meaning or the subject of the conversation. Try to keep calm when you are listening to someone talking. If you become anxious or flustered this may interfere with what you are trying to lipread or listen to. Remember that everybody makes mistakes of hearing, especially in noisy situations.

4. The communication environment

The physical environment can make a difference to how easy or difficult it is to hear what people are saying. For example a restaurant with lots of hard surfaces (tiled floor, no soft furnishings) will generally be more challenging to hear in compared to one with carpets, table cloths, soft chairs, curtains etc. This is because sound waves just bounce around on hard surfaces and can give an echo-like sound quality. This can be made even more difficult if there is also a high ceiling.

Of course background music can make a difference as well so it can be best to avoid restaurants or bars that play very loud music or ask for a table in a quieter corner if possible. Open kitchens in restaurants can also make following conversation more challenging.

If you notice that communication is better or worse than usual in any situation try looking around to find out why this may be so. Over time it may become second nature to choose places to go when socialising that maximize your chances of hearing.

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING DIFFICULT WORDS, NAMES AND PHRASES

Using strategies will help you succeed in giving and getting information over the telephone with strangers. It can sometimes help if you use the strategy first, so that the stranger understands what to do. Here is a list of strategies:

Strategy	Explanation
Repeat	Say it again
Spelling	Say each letter in the word
Code Words	Use a familiar word that starts with the letter spelt
Digits	Say each number
Key Word	Spell the important word in a sentence
Rephrase	Say it in a different way
Confirm	Repeat the information
Alphabet	Say the alphabet until you reach the letter
Counting	Count from zero until you reach the number