

A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for seniors, companions and restaurateurs to make dining enjoyable.



Contents:

Tips for Seniors.....Page 3

Tips for Dining Comapnions.....Page 5

Tips for Restaurants.....Page 7



A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for Seniors

Sounds Difficult.

For most of us, dining out is a pleasure, a chance to enjoy a nice meal with friends or family or celebrate a special occasion.

But for seniors and people who are hard of hearing, eating out can be stressful. Table conversation is difficult or impossible to follow. Hearing the waiter is a challenge. Background noise levels may be irritating, distracting or even painful.

For restaurants, it's a challenge.

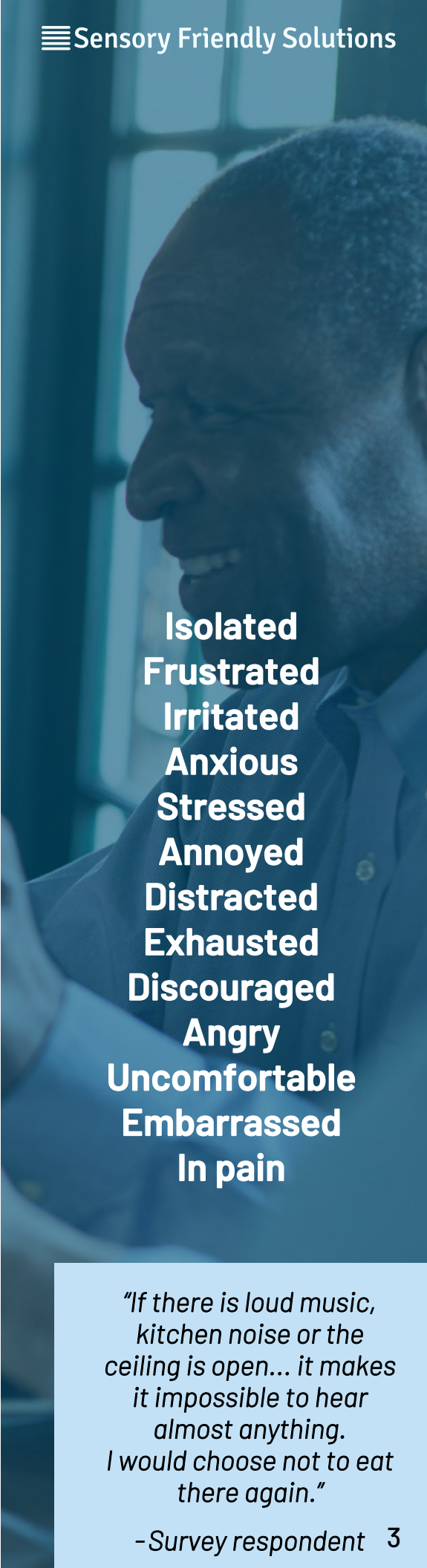
Restaurants are notoriously noisy. Many are open rooms with lots of hard surfaces that echo. And the bustling, social aspect of restaurants creates a cocktail of noise: the clang and clatter of dishes and cutlery; the sounds of people talking and laughing, the footfalls of staff and customers. And background music only adds to the din.

The repercussions are serious.

All this noise can lead to feelings of isolation for the senior who's hard of hearing, disappointment or frustration for their friends and family, and lost revenues for restaurants.

The good news?

There are simple steps diners and restaurants can take to make eating out far more enjoyable for seniors who are hard of hearing.



**Isolated
Frustrated
Irritated
Anxious
Stressed
Annoyed
Distracted
Exhausted
Discouraged
Angry
Uncomfortable
Embarrassed
In pain**

"If there is loud music, kitchen noise or the ceiling is open... it makes it impossible to hear almost anything. I would choose not to eat there again."

-Survey respondent 3

A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for Seniors

There are steps you can take before you arrive at the restaurant and during your meal to have a better experience eating out.

Self-Advocate

Most restaurants will accommodate requests, including:

1. Seating: Not all seats are created equal. Ask to be seated in a corner, as the walls help contain sound. A padded, high-backed booth is also a good choice. Ask for quiet seating when you make a reservation.

2. Music: Ask to be seated away from the speakers, and that the music be turned down or off.

Time

Eat out at non-peak hours, such as before noon or after 1 pm for lunch, or between 5-7 pm for dinner.

Recommendations

Ask friends and family for recommendations of quiet restaurants.

Reviews

If you write reviews, include details about noise levels in your comments. And read others' reviews to see if they mention noise.

Ready to learn more about living your life with noise sensitivity?

Sensory Friendly Solutions helps. Visit our website www.sensoryfriendly.net to find out more.

Look for sensory-friendly restaurants in the Sensory Friendly Finder.



Acknowledgements

Many people and organizations provided their expertise and support to create this guide. We thank New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. and Nancy Tissington, Uptown SJ for their support. This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program.

A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for Dining Companions

Sounds Difficult.

For most of us, dining out is a pleasure, a chance to enjoy a nice meal with friends or family or celebrate a special occasion.

But for seniors and people who are hard of hearing, eating out can be stressful. Table conversation is often impossible to follow. Hearing the waiter is a challenge. Background noise levels may be irritating, distracting or even painful.

For restaurants, it's a challenge.

Restaurants are notoriously noisy. Many are open rooms with lots of hard surfaces that echo. And the bustling, social aspect of restaurants creates a cocktail of noise: the clang and clatter of dishes and cutlery; the sounds of people talking and laughing, the footfalls of staff and customers. And background music only adds to the din.

The repercussions are serious.

All this noise can lead to feelings of isolation for the senior who's hard of hearing, disappointment or frustration for their friends and family, and lost revenues for restaurants.

The good news?

There are simple steps that customers and restaurants can take to make eating out far more enjoyable for seniors who are hard of hearing.

Isolated
Frustrated
Irritated
Anxious
Stressed
Annoyed
Distracted
Exhausted
Discouraged
Angry
Uncomfortable
Embarrassed
In pain

"If a restaurant is overly noisy, it creates anxiety, stress and frustration. If I'm not able to enjoy a quiet meal and conversation, I might as well stay home."

- Survey respondent

A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for Dining Companions

There are lots of ways that family, friends and caregivers of people who are hard of hearing can make eating out more enjoyable.

Make Contact

First, make sure you have their attention. Look directly at them for the duration of the conversation.

Speak Clearly

Speak clearly and at a reasonable pace. Don't yell. And slow it down – don't dumb it down.

Numbers matter

Smaller groups are better. The bigger the gathering, the more likely it is to be difficult for the hard-of-hearing person.

Hands-Free

Keep your hands away from your face during the conversation so they can read your facial expression and hear you as clearly as possible. Don't take sips or bites in the middle of speaking.

Be Aware

Awareness goes a long way. Remember, there is someone here who cannot participate as easily as the rest of the group.

Take Turns

If the group is too big for a single conversation, take turns having one-on-one conversations with the person who's hard of hearing. Switch seats partway through to mix it up.

Talking Stick

Take turns speaking, rather than having multiple conversations going on around the table. That way, everybody feels heard and everybody has a chance to speak.

Ready to learn more about living your life with noise sensitivity?

Sensory Friendly Solutions helps.

Visit our website www.sensoryfriendly.net to find out more.

Look for sensory-friendly restaurants in the Sensory Friendly Finder.



Acknowledgements

Many people and organizations provided their expertise and support to create this guide. We thank New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. and Nancy Tissington, Uptown SJ for their support. This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program.

A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss

Tips for Restaurants

Too Much Noise Can Ruin a Great Meal

"I definitely eat out less often because of my hearing loss," one respondent to a recent survey wrote. "It's not fun when you can't participate with your friends."

For **seniors who are hard of hearing**, eating out can be a hardship. Whether it's a family birthday dinner, anniversary date night or monthly coffee group, they **often feel cut off**:

- Feeling left out
- Impossible to hear conversations
- Painful noise levels
- Distant or frustrated
- Leave sooner
- Unpleasant dining experience
- Risk of social isolation
- Contribute to depression
- Feel excluded
- Avoid dining out at all

[The World Health Organization](#) shares that 33% of the world's population over 65 has disabling hearing loss.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Ready to take action?

Restaurants are increasingly interested in how they can better serve seniors with hearing loss.

There are simple steps that diners and restaurants can take to make eating out far more enjoyable for seniors who are hard of hearing.

"Most of our clients do not advocate for themselves because it becomes exhausting. They simply opt not to go. They think, 'I don't need to battle.'"

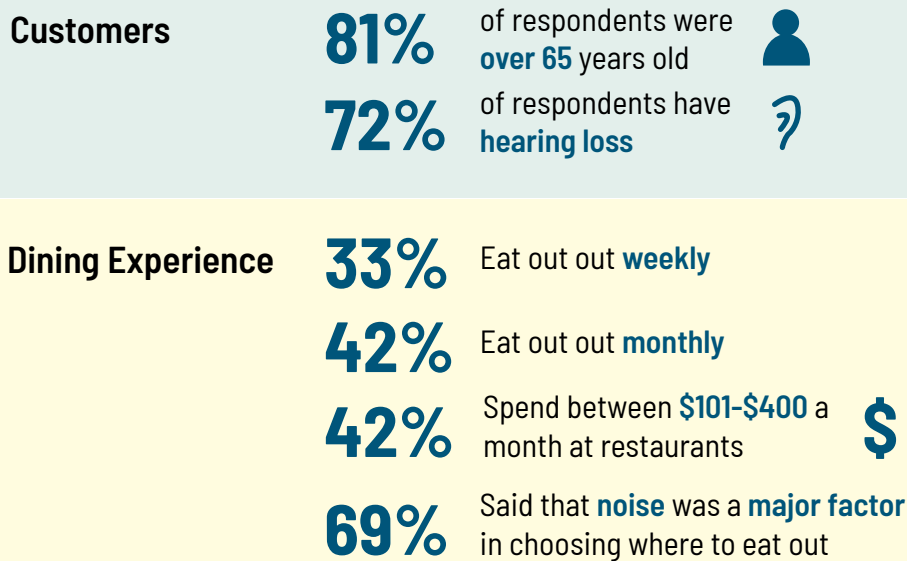
- Heather Chandler, New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Inc.

The Solution for Restaurants

Your restaurant is a unique combination of great food, friendly service and ambience – all to **keep your customers coming back**.

But did you know that noise is also a major factor in choosing a restaurant, particularly for seniors who are hard of hearing?

We conducted a survey in May 2020 with these results:



**Seniors + Hearing Loss + Noisy Restaurant
= Poor Dining Experience + Less Revenue**

Many restaurants are beginning to realize how much business they are losing to hard-of-hearing customers who, rather than speak up about the noise or ask for accommodations, simply stop dining out.

There are **FREE OR LOW-COST** things you can do today, including **brighter lighting, low (or no) music, and staff who are attentive to the challenges and needs of people who are hard of hearing.**

"If a restaurant is overly noisy, it creates anxiety, stress and frustration. If I'm not able to enjoy a quiet meal and conversation, I might as well stay home."

- Survey respondent

Your actions help people with:

- Hearing loss
- Autism
- ADHD
- Concussion
- PTSD
- Sound Sensitivity
- And many more

How to Create a Better Restaurant Experience

Tips for Restaurants

There are many free or low-cost ways to attract and retain hard-of-hearing customers.

Seating

Provide seating options in a quiet corner or include high-sided booths.

Music

Keep the volume low at all times. Turn it down or off, upon request.

Time

Offer quiet hours.

Accommodate

Train your staff to accommodate special requests whenever possible.

Wait Staff

Train your staff to:

- Face their body directly to the customer they are speaking to.
- Look directly at the customer when they are placing their order.
- That helps the customer read the staff's lips and facial expressions.
- Staff will also be able to tell if the customer is struggling to understand.

Repeat

If a customer asks your server to repeat something, they should say it again the same way they first said it.

Decor

Opt for sound-absorbing carpeting, tablecloths, fabric-covered furniture and soft window coverings. Attractive portable room dividers, chair feet and acoustic tiles can help muffle the sounds of a busy dining room.

Lighting

Brighten your lighting. People who are hard of hearing often rely on other senses, such as eyesight. Low lighting can result in eye strain and headaches.

Visuals

Make sure washrooms and exits are clearly marked.

Write your daily specials or menus on a chalkboard, as well as having your servers recite them.

Seating

Space tables as much as possible, or create a quiet corner. Padded booths with high backs are better. Consider increasing your outdoor seating capacity.

Ready to improve your customer experience?

Sensory Friendly Solutions helps.

Visit our website www.sensoryfriendly.net to find out more, and add your restaurant to the Sensory Friendly Finder.



Acknowledgements

Many people and organizations provided their expertise and support to create this guide. We thank New Brunswick Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc. and Nancy Tissington, Uptown SJ for their support. This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for downloading A Better Restaurant Experience for Seniors with Hearing Loss Guide.

Kudos to you for taking a positive step towards creating a comfortable dining experience. I hope this eBook gives you simple tips to make eating out an enjoyable experience, especially for seniors with hearing loss.

This eBook is somewhat personal for me. I have adult-onset hearing loss, wear hearing aids, use assistive devices and struggle to find places to eat out with friends and family that I can enjoy.

Many people find the world too busy, too noisy and too bright and are looking for sensory-friendly daily life experiences. Restaurants worldwide are creating sensory-friendly spaces for their patrons because they care.

I founded Sensory-Friendly Solutions to help make sensory-friendly solutions available to people, businesses and organizations.

Sensory Friendly Solutions' resources will help you learn more about sensory challenges and discover sensory-friendly solutions.

Join us on social media, download and subscribe to our podcast and visit our website to discover sensory-friendly solutions for everyday living.



With thanks,

Christel Seeberger
Founder & CEO
Sensory Friendly Solutions

