



Cochlear[®]
Hear now. And always

Cochlear Family

Adult phone and online
communication guide



“I bought a phone and just started making simple phone calls - like booking a table in a restaurant - where I was controlling the call and I had an idea what the answers would be. I had a lot of failures, but I kept at it, and slowly, bit by bit, it got better.”

Charlotte, Cochlear™ Nucleus® system recipient.

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Introduction

In an increasingly digitally connected world, the way we interact with each other has evolved over time. The move toward using online meeting and video calls to communicate, may require you to familiarise yourself with new online platforms.

The good news is that this mode of communication, along with text messaging and the wider availability of closed captioning during online calls is helping to make communication more accessible and inclusive for people with hearing loss.

In this guide, you will find rehab exercises you can do in the comfort of your home environment, and some practical tips to help you gain more confidence having conversations on the phone or online.

For more tips on communication strategies and hearing exercises designed to build conversational confidence, refer to the “Adult communications strategies guide”. We also recommend speaking with your hearing healthcare professional or clinical team for a more tailored rehabilitation plan.

Practical advice for phone and video calls

Taking the time to work on your conversational confidence over the phone and on video calls is a big commitment. We want you to feel supported and set up for success. So, we have shared five practical tips for you to consider before starting the listening exercises in this guide.

Rehab at home

- 1 To hear your best on the phone, we encourage you to wear your sound processor as much as possible. It's also important to follow the guidance of your hearing healthcare team and continue to do listening and rehab exercises regularly. Refer to the "Adult at-home rehab and listening exercise guide" for some tips to get you started.

Check phone compatibility

- 2 There are a large number of mobile phone options on the market. If you elect to get a new mobile phone, we recommend checking that your new device is compatible with your sound processor.

Direct audio streaming from your mobile phone to the sound processor can help to optimise speech clarity on phone calls. If your sound processor technology permits, we recommend directly streaming phone and video audio using a compatible* Apple™ or Android™ device. For information regarding the compatibility of Cochlear's Sound Processors with Apple or Android devices, visit www.cochlear.com/compatibility

If your current mobile phone or sound processor technology does not allow for direct streaming, this can be achieved using the Mini Microphone 2+ or Phone Clip. Visit the Device Support page on cochlear.com or refer to your user manual for instructions on how to use these accessories with your sound processor.

Speak to your hearing healthcare professional

- 3 We recommend speaking to your hearing healthcare professional about how to optimise the settings on your sound processor.

Put clear communication into practice

- 4 When you are talking to others on the phone or on video calls, remind others to use good phone technique and speak clearly. For example, you can ask your conversational partners to speak directly into the mouthpiece and speak naturally at a moderate speed. If you are continuing to experience difficulty hearing on the phone, try asking your conversational partner to re-phrase the sentence instead of repeating it.

Or, if your listening is at a level that makes it harder for you to understand a phone signal, don't be afraid to arrange video calls. You may find the visual cues provided through video calls more beneficial.

Consider background noise

- 5 During phone calls and video calls, remember to consider your environment. Background noise can make it harder to hear speech. If your conversational partner is calling from a busy café or using handsfree whilst in the car, it may be harder for you to hear what they are saying. Don't be afraid to explain that background noise makes it harder for you to hear and ask your conversational partner to call you back when they are in a quieter environment.

If you are on a video call, remind conversational partners to face the camera when speaking and to choose a quiet location with good lighting so you can see their face during the call.

Use captions

- 6 You can consider using live captioning on video conferencing apps or subtitles which inbuilt into some browsers and apps.



“If you’re learning to use the phone again, organise a daily call with a friend or family member who has a slow, clear speaking voice.”

Karen, Cochlear™ Nucleus® system recipient.

Tips to help build your confidence on phone and video calls

Getting confident and comfortable with speaking on the phone and on online video calls can take some time. But working on your hearing and listening rehab can go a long way toward building on the skills you already have.

Optimise your technology

- 1 Check that you are using the sound processor program and setting you hear best with before starting. If you are using external speakers for your listening exercises, set the volume at a moderate level and try not to use built-in laptop speakers – they tend to distort sound which will affect the quality and clarity of the speech.

Another tip is to switch on ForwardFocus* if you aren’t using direct streaming. We recommend speaking with your hearing healthcare professional about enabling ForwardFocus, as it may improve your listening experience by reducing the background noise behind you. This can be particularly helpful during video calls.

Find a Rehab Partner

- 2 You will get the best results from phone rehab when you work with a supportive family member or close friend. This is especially important when you are practising phone call exercises. When you are first getting started, we recommend that you work with someone whose voice is very familiar. You could even try developing a script that you can role play with your rehab partner. This may be a good way to ease into things and help practise your listening.

Practise regularly

- 3 Listening practice should be broken up into short, but frequent sessions. We recommend practising for around 10 - 15 minutes per day, five days a week. We have shared some phone exercises you can do below. Alternate the days when you do rehab with a partner

Set and revise listening goals

- 4 You can track your progress by setting listening goals. You can set realistic goals with the help of your hearing healthcare professional. Remember not to put too much pressure on yourself, your goals can always be revisited over time and adapted.

Be an advocate and educate others

- 5 Don't be afraid to remind family, friends and colleagues about the phone and online call communication strategies that will make listening easier for you. For example, request that they speak clearly and at a moderate pace.

If they are taking the call in an environment with a lot of background noise, ask if they can move to a quieter area or re-schedule the call to a time when they may be in a quieter setting. For video calls, encourage communication partners to face the camera so you get extra visual cues and to use headphones with a microphone, so their voice sounds clearer.

For more specific tips on communicating in the workplace and on online meetings, refer to our “Practical Guide for Workplace Communication” resource.





Rehab exercises for phone and online calls

Below are some simple exercises that you can follow to help make you feel more comfortable communicating with others over the phone and on online calls.

Develop a rehab plan

- 1** Before you get started on your phone rehab journey, speak to your audiologist or clinician. They will help determine the best rehab plan for you. The steps below are just ideas on how to get started.

Practise with a familiar speaker

- 2** When you first get started with phone rehab, begin by practising at home with a family member or someone that lives with you. Their voice will be most familiar to you and will make it easier for you to recognise what they are saying over the phone. Arrange to have five-minute calls with your rehab partner two to three times a week and choose a different topic to talk about each time. This will expose you to a wider variety of words and help expand your vocabulary. Remember to take the calls in different rooms of the house.

Video call with a familiar speaker

- 3** Video and online calls now play a big role in how we communicate. So, it's a good idea to explore making calls using video platforms. If possible, use the platform that you will be using most for work or leisure. Again, start by practising these calls with a familiar speaker. You may find that conversations using video calls are a bit easier to follow because of the additional information that comes from visual cues.

Check if the video call platform that you are using has options for closed captions. This will be especially helpful when you are first getting started, but when you are feeling a bit more confident, you can try switching these off. Depending on how clear the audio signal is, you may find it beneficial to keep these in place.

Auditory rehab with apps and websites

- 4** Another way to build your confidence with using the phone is to work on your auditory rehab. Try doing independent auditory rehab on the days that you aren't practising phone or video calls with your rehab partner. Speak to your clinician about any websites or apps they can recommend. Remember, 10 -15 minutes a day is all you need to do!

Video streaming, audiobooks and social media

- 5** When you start to get more confident with doing phone or video calls with family members, it's time to move onto understanding less familiar speakers. A great way to get started is to listen to YouTube videos, TedTalks or audiobooks, as the content focuses mostly on speech without background music. For more of a challenge you can watch clips that are being shared on social media platforms. When you are listening to the speakers, listen carefully and focus on distinguishing accents, recognising shifts in tone and pace of speaking.

Phone call with less familiar speakers i.e. friends

- 6** Once you have done independent auditory rehab and feel ready for the next challenge, you can arrange to have a call with a slightly less familiar speaker. If you've never tried this before, it may take a bit of practise. This is also a good opportunity to practise your self-advocacy skills – gently remind new conversational partners to speak up or slow down their speech if you are having trouble understanding what they are saying.

Call a business with a simple enquiry

- 7** A great way to build confidence when speaking to new people on the phone, is to start by asking a simple question that you may already know the answer to. When you are the one making an inquiry, you are in control of the call and will have a good idea of what the response may be. For example, try calling a shop and asking them what their opening hours are. Before making the call, you can practise with your rehab partner at home. For example, "Hello, can you please tell me what time your store closes today?".

Order something over the phone

- 8** If you feel ready, try ordering something over the phone. Phone orders tend to follow a predictable pattern, which can help you prepare and anticipate what will be said. A good one to start with is ordering a pizza. Write down your order before the call and practise what you will say. Things you can prepare are:
- o Your greeting and how you will begin the call
 - o Talking about your order
 - o How you will be paying
 - o If you would like the pizza delivered or collected

Celebrate your wins (even the small ones)

- 9** Dedicating time out of your day for listening and hearing practise requires commitment and using the phone or new online call platforms for the first time can be a bit nerve wracking for everyone. Don't forget that you can also achieve many of the things you want to via online services. If you find listening on the phone challenging, you can always use other methods to achieve your goals e.g.. online ordering or booking. So, remember to do rehab at your own pace and celebrate your progress.

For more information, please contact your local Cochlear customer service team or speak to your hearing healthcare professional.

Hear now. And always

Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a world full of hearing. As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, we have provided more than 650,000 devices and helped people of all ages to hear and connect with life's opportunities.

We aim to give people the best lifelong hearing experience and access to next generation technologies. We collaborate with leading clinical, research and support networks to advance hearing science and improve care.

That's why more people choose Cochlear than any other hearing implant company.

References

1. Jackson, D. D., Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B. (2014). Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes. United Kingdom: W. W. Norton, Incorporated.
2. Improving Understanding with Communication Strategies (What to do when you don't understand), Susan Binzer, November 2010, produced by Cochlear Ltd (FUN2041 ISS1 NOV10)

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* ForwardFocus is a clinician-enabled, user-controlled feature

Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always follow the directions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear Technology.

Cochlear™ Nucleus® implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderately severe to profound hearing loss. Baha implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderate to profound hearing loss

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