**Can't hear what the people around you are saying over Christmas dinner? Tilt your HEAD, say scientists**

* **Moving your head by 30 degrees increases sound of speech by four decibels**
* **For some this can be the difference between hearing nothing and everything**
* **The head blocks the sounds from reaching the ears, acting as a 'baffle'**

By [Victoria Allen, Science Correspondent For Mailonline](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Victoria+Allen,+Science+Correspondent+For+Mailonline)

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It may seem obvious but people struggling to hear in a crowded room are advised by scientists to turn their head to the side.

Many eating Christmas dinner will face a battle to hear over the chatter of assembled family members, but moving your head just 30 degrees could make a huge difference.

Scientists at Cardiff University say the most natural behaviour is for us to speak face-to-face. However they found a small head tilt increased the sound of speech by four decibels – the difference for some people between hearing nothing of a conversation and understanding it perfectly.

That is because, as common sense would suggest, the head blocks the sound from reaching the ears, acting as a ‘baffle’ – an object preventing the flow of sound.

The 30 degree tilt is recommended for people with hearing loss, who have cochlear implants, but also those with normal hearing who simply struggle to follow conversation in noisy rooms.

Dr Ralph Holme, head of biomedical research at charity Action on Hearing Loss, said: ‘Action on Hearing Loss is delighted to have funded this important study which has highlighted a simple, yet effective tactic that everyone can use to help hear friends and family in noisy places such as restaurants, and hopefully this advice can be relayed to cochlear implant users who would really stand to benefit.

‘We are also campaigning for bars, restaurants and cafes to do more to improve their acoustics to make it easier for people with a hearing loss to engage in conversation.’

Middle-aged people may have known for years that asking someone to speak directly into their ear makes it easier to hear them. But the Cardiff researchers tested a 30-degree move of the ear towards the speaker in two experiments.

In the first, 20 young people with normal hearing and 19 using cochlear implants were put in rooms with four speakers surrounding them, then played sentences on video screens.

The tilt was found to work in this scenario, as well as in a ‘real-life’ situation where a realistic simulation of a restaurant was created with a target talker at the same table as the listener and other voices distributed around the room.

A 60-degree head tilt could provide a benefit of up to eight decibels, the study found. But 30 degrees could increase the received volume of speech by four decibels – a quarter of the difference between silence and a whisper in terms of noise increase.

For people with cochlear implants, it was also found to be compatible with lip reading which was unaffected by a modest, 30-degree head orientation.

Previous studies have mostly looked at how sound travels when people communicate face to face.

Dr Jacques Grange, from Cardiff University’s School of Psychology said: ‘Noise can be a big issue for any listener and especially for someone with a cochlear implant. Our study shows that by simply turning one ear towards the person they are listening to, cochlear implant users find it much easier to hear that person above background noise, enabling them to engage in conversations in noisy environments, and not become isolated.

‘It’s better to have a clear signal in one ear than a mediocre signal in both.’