

Protect the Hearing of Staff and Customers in Your Restaurant or Bar



Noise is the top complaint in New York City's (NYC) 311 system. New Yorkers filed more than 20,000 complaints about loud bars, clubs and restaurants in 2017. Exposure to loud noise over time can damage your hearing, sometimes permanently, and also lead to other health problems. Take action to reduce noise in your restaurant. Your staff and customers will thank you!

Your restaurant may be too noisy if:

- You need to raise your voice to be heard by someone standing an arm's length away
- You get a buzzing or ringing sound in your ears, even temporarily
- Your hearing feels muffled after the noise stops
- You feel pain or discomfort in your ears

Health effects of loud noise

Exposure to loud noise (85 decibels or higher) over time can cause damage to the inner ear, resulting in **noise-induced hearing loss** and/or a ringing or buzzing in the ear (**tinnitus**). The louder the sound and the longer the exposure, the greater the damage. Exposure to loud noise can also cause **increased blood pressure, muscle tension, ulcers, sleep loss, fatigue and stress**.

Tips to reduce noise exposure in your restaurant:

- Lower the volume of music in kitchen and dining areas.
- Consider installing design features that lessen noise, such as acoustic panels.
- Move noisy equipment, such as ice and soda machines, away from dining areas.
- Purchase quieter versions of equipment, such as ice machines, compressors and dishwashers when possible.
- Locate wait stations, which can be noisy, away from dining areas. Consider putting partitions around wait stations.
- Soundproof kitchen doors.
- Put rubber caps on chair legs in dining areas.
- Make sure heating and air conditioning equipment work well. Poorly maintained equipment can be noisy.
- Offer hearing protection for customers in noisy areas.

Find additional resources

- Noise levels in the workplace are regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). If you have a restaurant or bar with high noise levels, you may be required to implement a **hearing conservation program** for your employees.
- A noise consultant can help you determine if levels are too high, identify noise sources, and recommend strategies for reducing noise.
 - Request a free and confidential noise consultation from the New York State Department of Labor at onsite@labor.ny.gov.
 - Hire a **sound assessment consultant** from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's approved list.

Guide to Decibel (dBa) Levels of Common Sounds

40 dBa	Humming of refrigerator
60 dBa	Normal conversation
85 dBa	Noise from heavy city traffic
95 dBa	Motorcycles
105 dBa	Rock concert
120 dBa	Sirens
150 dBa	Firecrackers and firearms

Please note: exposure labels are not exact and vary by distance from the source.