



# Does Loud Noise Influence Your Social Life?

## Over 1,700 Respondents Reveal Recreational Choices in Tinnitus Awareness Week Survey

*The ATA and SoundPrint advocate for safe sound levels in public recreational spaces so people with tinnitus and/or hearing loss can more easily enjoy get-togethers with friends, family, and colleagues. To make a more compelling argument on the importance of the topic, the ATA and SoundPrint issued a survey, which was completed by more than 1,700 people during Tinnitus Awareness Week.*

By Joy Onozuka

### With the ongoing coronavirus

pandemic, most of us have led a sequestered existence, with limited outings for well over a year. For some people with reactive tinnitus, which refers to tinnitus that gets louder for a period of time after exposure to loud sound, or with hyperacusis (sound sensitivity), the pandemic provided a reprieve and an acceptable excuse to say no to get-togethers. Life literally and figuratively became quieter, which, for some, meant heightened stress because of increased awareness of tinnitus.

Now that we have a rollout of vaccines, we should be able to leave behind our cloistered existence in the not too distant future. In anticipation of that and the knowledge that so many recreational venues are struggling, the



***“Sixty-nine percent of respondents left a venue because it was too loud, with 78 percent of them indicating they did not return.”***

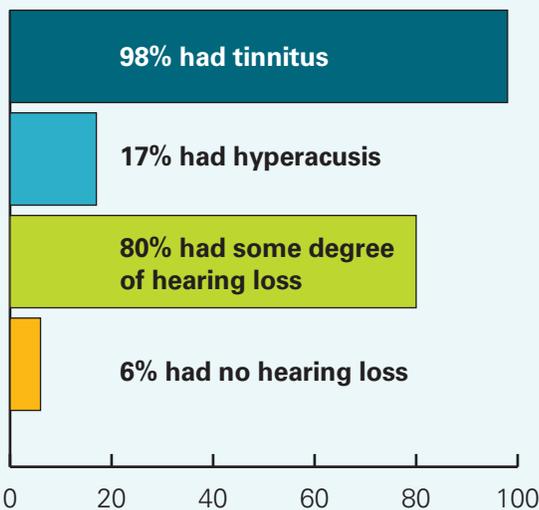
American Tinnitus Association and the people behind SoundPrint, the free app that helps you find quiet spaces, decided now is the time to advocate for quieter recreational spaces. To make that appeal, we launched a survey as part of Tinnitus Awareness Week, February 1–7, 2021, to gather data on how noise influences recreational behavior among people with tinnitus and/or hearing loss.

The 15-question survey, which was open throughout Tinnitus Awareness Week and distributed via email to people in the ATA’s and SoundPrint’s respective databases, was completed by 1,758 respondents. For self-reported information on hearing health, 98 percent of respondents had tinnitus, 17 percent had hyperacusis, 80 percent had some degree of

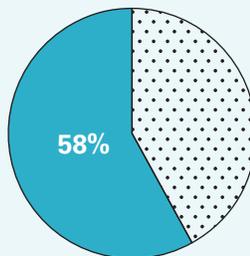


# ATA and SoundPrint Survey

Self-Reported Information on Hearing Health from 1,758 Respondents of 2021 Tinnitus Awareness Week Survey



**58% of respondents actively avoid restaurants, bars, cafés, movie theaters, and gym classes due to noise**



hearing loss, and 6 percent had no hearing loss.

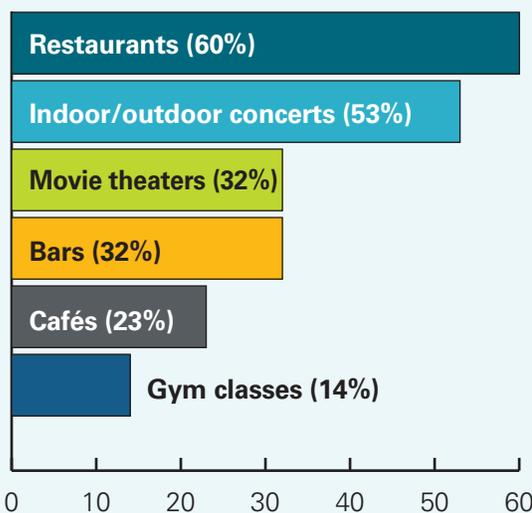
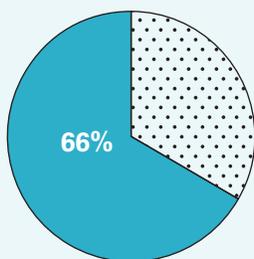
Results confirmed that prior to the pandemic the majority of people — 58 percent of respondents — actively avoided restaurants, bars, cafés, movie theaters, and gym classes because of loud noise. Unsurprisingly, just over 57 percent indicated that they had specific restaurants, cafés, and bars they frequented because those were typically quiet. Despite that, 38 percent found that background noise “almost always” interfered with their ability to converse or connect with friends and family in social settings, and 51 percent indicated that it “sometimes” interfered with communication.

A whopping 69 percent of respondents left a venue because it was too loud, with 78 percent of them indicating they did not return. A few people noted they returned during off hours. Some, however, said they preferred louder settings, as noted in the following comments: “I don’t seek out quiet places because I become more aware of my tinnitus” and “I seek loud places to cover up the noise of my tinnitus.”

Respondents were almost evenly split on saying something to staff about noise levels, with the majority (52%) answering in the negative. Reasons for not saying anything about noise included not wanting to cause a fuss, not wanting to impose their opinions on others, and knowing beforehand that it was a loud venue. For those who did complain about noise, 57 percent felt the complaint wasn’t well received or failed to result in a reduction in noise.

## Places People Would Visit More Often if it Were Quieter

**66% of respondents who would go out more if recreational venues were more reliably quiet**



Other notable places people would like to go include church, dentist, work meetings, sporting events.

Several survey questions were included to measure use and interest in using apps to check sound levels and to communicate indirectly with restaurants about noise concerns. Such questions were intended to help SoundPrint, which offers a free, easy-to-use crowdsourcing app, understand the concerns of the tinnitus community. Gregory Scott, the founder of the app, developed it for personal use before releasing it to the public in 2018, when he discovered people with normal hearing were also looking for quiet spaces. The app is used by more than 100,000 people worldwide, mostly in the United States and Canada.

Among survey respondents, only 23 percent use a smartphone app or decibel meter to measure sound levels, even though 77 percent expressed an interest in using one. More than 60 percent of respondents were interested in using an app to make an anonymous noise complaint, a feature of the SoundPrint app.

Besides the noise complaint feature, the app also includes a quiet recommendation feature that enables users to highlight high-noise places to be avoided and easy-listening locations to enjoy. When someone submits a complaint, SoundPrint reaches out to the loud venue directly, offers noise mitigation recommendations, and links venue managers with acoustic professionals who can help educate them and optimize the venue's sonic experience. The intention is to generate awareness and offer affordable solutions, not chastise establishments.

***“Only 23 percent use a smartphone app or decibel meter to measure sound levels, even though 77 percent expressed an interest in using one.”***

A quiet recommendation from users allows SoundPrint to promote the quiet venue by placing it on curated Quiet Lists, which all app users can access. Just over 74 percent of respondents were interested in using Quiet Lists, while 26 percent were not.

Among the most important findings, as related to advocacy, was the reply from 66 percent of respondents who said they would go

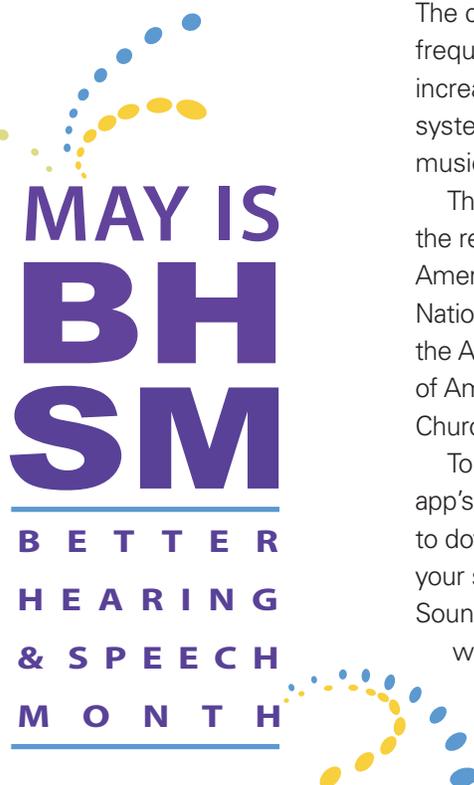
out more if recreational venues were more reliably quiet. Places people would visit more often included restaurants (60%), indoor/outdoor concerts (53%), movie theaters (32%), bars (32%), cafés (23%), and gym classes (14%). Under “other” venues, which people could write in, numerous people noted they would go more frequently to church, the dentist, work meetings, and sporting events if sound levels were less intrusive. The comment on churches was frequent and hence notable, reflecting increased use of mics and speaker systems to amplify sermons and music, particularly at megachurches.

The ATA and SoundPrint will share the results of the survey with the American Restaurant Association, the National Association of Theatre Owners, the Athletics and Fitness Association of America, and the National Council of Churches, among others.

To learn more about SoundPrint, the app's measurement process, and how to download the free app to your smartphone, visit the SoundPrint website: <https://www.soundprint.co/> 



SoundPrint



**COMMUNICATION DISORDERS  
ARE TREATABLE**