

# How To Protect Your Hearing

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It is estimated internationally that 16% of the population has a hearing impairment. Hearing loss can affect any individual irrespective of race, gender or age. Its main causes are aging and noise exposure. Our hearing starts deteriorating during our thirties and forties. By the time we are 80 years old, almost half of us will have hearing loss. As far as noise exposure is concerned, it has been proven that long-term repeated exposure to noise can cause irreversible damage to hearing. The noise can come from construction work, car horns and alarms as well as from rock concerts, CD players, and iPod earphones.

Noises that can damage hearing are at least 85 decibels (dB) loud. It is good to know that a normal conversation is 60db loud. CD players can produce sounds of 100dB whereas rock concerts and iPods can reach 120dB. How can one tell if the noise is dangerously loud? Well, if you need to shout to be heard by somebody sitting next to you, then the noise is louder than 85dB and can harm your hearing.

Does hearing loss hurt? No. The diminution of hearing takes place very gradually and is not accompanied by pain so a lot of people do not realize the damage that takes place until it is too late. After the noise exposure, you may have buzzing or ringing sounds in your ears as well as difficulty hearing. After one or two days, the symptoms subside and hearing goes back to normal. However, repeated exposure to noise eventually leads to permanent damage.

The good news is that noise-induced hearing loss is 100% preventable. In order to protect your hearing, try to reduce the level of noise in your everyday life. More specifically:

» Reduce the loudness level and exposure time: adjust the volume on your iPod or radio to 60% of its maximum capacity and reduce exposure to no more than 60 minutes.

» Keep a distance from noise: if you move away from the noise source even for a few meters you can reduce the noise loudness level to half.

» Use ear plugs: always use ear plugs when you use a lawn mower or other loud electrical equipment. You can find them in all pharmacy stores or get custom ones made in an audiology clinic. If you are not sure which ones are right for you, consult your audiologist.

» Seek silence: after lengthy exposure to noise, for example in a club, turn off all sources of noise in the house (TV, radio) for at least 10 hours so as to allow the system of hearing to rest and go back to normal.

» Don't try to cover one noise with another: for example, don't turn up your car radio so as not to hear traffic.

» Insulate your house: put carpets and curtains in all rooms of your house. They can absorb a big part of the noise.

» Protect children: encourage your children to wear ear plugs when they are in a very noisy environment. Spend time to explain to them the harmful effects of iPods and how important it is to protect their hearing. Emphasize that they have to keep the volume down and limit the listening time. Take measures for young children that are not in a position to protect themselves.

» Get informed: get information about the sources of noise pollution that can damage hearing.

» Finally, have a hearing test once a year as a preventative measure.

**For more information on hearing loss, ear plugs, or to book an appointment for your FREE hearing test contact :**



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