Preventing noise-induced hearing loss

Many people work, play and live around environmental noise that is dangerously loud. About one-third of all hearing loss is caused by exposure to noise. However, by being aware of the noise level, limiting your exposure and using hearing protection, noise-induced hearing loss is **100% preventable!**

Noise-induced hearing loss is caused by both the intensity of the noise and how long you are exposed. It can happen without pain and accumulate over a lifetime, or it can be painful and occur rapidly. Once acquired, the loss is permanent.

Noise-induced hearing loss can affect people at any age. About 12% of children between the ages of 6 to 19 have a noise-induced hearing loss. An estimated 24% of adults under the age of 70 in the U.S. have noise-induced hearing loss.

Noise levels are hazardous when:

- You have to shout to be heard.
- You can't hear someone talking to you from three feet away.
- You have ringing or pain in your ears during or even after leaving a noisy area.
- Sounds and/or speech seem "muffled" or distorted after exposure to noise.
- Others can hear the sound coming from your headset.

It is up to you to protect your hearing at home, at work and at play. To protect your hearing and your family's hearing, follow these tips.

Be aware of noise levels

Noise hazards can occur in any setting: work, home and recreational. Without hearing protection, riding snowmobiles or motorcycles, shooting firearms or fireworks and listening to extremely loud music or movies can damage your hearing. Use hearing protection when attending loud entertainment events or engaging in any noisy activities.

Examples of sounds and their decibel (dB) levels:

- 30 dB: Whisper, quiet library
- 40 dB: Refrigerator
- 50 dB: Moderate rainfall
- 60 dB: Conversations, dishwasher
- 70 dB: Busy traffic, vacuum cleaner
- 80 dB: Alarm clock, busy street
- 90 dB: Lawnmower, shop tools, truck traffic, subway
- 100 dB: Snowmobile, chainsaw, pneumatic drill
- 110 dB: Rock music, model airplane

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SERVICES DIVISION

Contact us!
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800-657-3663 voice
651-964-1514 videophone

- 120 dB: Jet plane take-off, car stereo, band practice
- 130 dB: Jackhammer
- 140 dB: Firearms, air raid siren, jet engine

Curious about the sounds in your environment? You can use smartphone or tablet apps to measure the noise level around you. Search for “sound level meters” in your app store.

Limit how long you are exposed

The louder the sound, the less time you can safely be exposed without risking damage to your hearing. According to the Center for Disease Control, loud noise can possibly damage hearing in:

- 85 dB: 8 hours
- 88 dB: 4 hours
- 91 dB: 2 hours
- 94 dB: 60 minutes
- 100 dB: 14 minutes

Limiting the time you work with power tools or yard tools helps to protect your hearing. Also limit play time with loud toys and recreational equipment. Be aware of the risks of using headphones or earbuds to listen to games, tablets and smartphones. Follow the 60/60 rule and limit listening at 60% volume to a maximum of 60 minutes.

Wear hearing protection!

Reduce your risk of noise-induced hearing loss by wearing hearing protection whenever you will be in a noisy environment or using loud equipment. It is that easy!

Hearing protection is available in a variety of styles, such as expandable foam earplugs, reusable earplugs, custom molded earplugs and ear muffs. You can buy hearing protection at most drugstores and home improvement stores.

The best hearing protection for you is the one you are willing to wear consistently, so find something you like that is comfortable and suits your lifestyle.

Encourage your employer to implement a hearing conservation program

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandates work environments with noise levels of 85 decibels or more to have hearing conservation programs.

Learn more

- It’s a Noisy Planet’s website (https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov/)
- It’s a Noisy Planet’s How Loud is Too Loud? bookmark (https://www.noisyplanet.nidcd.nih.gov/sites/noisyplanet/files/Documents/Publications/HowLoudTooLoudBookmark.pdf)
- Centers for Disease Control’s webpage How Do I Prevent Hearing Loss (https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/how_do_i_prevent_hearing_loss.html)
- CDC’s webpage What Noises Cause Hearing Loss (https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/what_noises_cause_hearing_loss.html)

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LB2 (8-16)

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