

Reduce noise to prevent hearing damage

Exposure to hazardous levels of noise is one of the most common causes of hearing loss.

Both the intensity of the noise and the duration of time spent exposed to the noise affects how hazardous it is to your hearing. A single loud gunshot at close range can permanently damage your hearing in an instant. Repeated exposure to loud industrial noise, loud music or loud recreational noise can also damage your hearing. This is called 'Noise-induced hearing loss' (NIHL).

NIHL is typically a gradual, progressive loss of high frequency (or pitch) hearing sensitivity over time, as a result of exposure to excessive noise levels. Excessive noise damages the delicate hair cells in the inner ear. When the hearing system is exposed to excessive noise, mechanical and metabolic changes can occur from this stress, damaging the inner and outer hair cells' function and structure.

This damage results in sensorineural hearing loss and often tinnitus (i.e. ringing, roaring or buzzing sounds in the ears). Sensorineural hearing loss is irreversible and permanent. The intensity of sound is reduced with sensorineural hearing loss, but even more detrimental, clarity (particularly of speech) is also reduced – even when sounds are loud enough to compensate for the hearing loss.

Tinnitus is often referred to as 'ringing in the ears,' which can range from mild to severe, and thus only be noticeable in a quiet room, or very loud and annoying at all times. Tinnitus does not cause hearing loss, but often accompanies decreased hearing and other ear problems.

While many people recognize that industrial noise can be hazardous to their hearing, most do not take into account recreational noise exposure (including power tools, diesel trucks, music, off-road vehicles, power boats, lawn mowers, chain saws, etc.). Noises above 85 decibels are considered most damaging.

So given this, what can you do to protect your hearing?

- If you work in an at-risk occupation, check with your employer to ensure you have adequate hearing protection. Some occupations that are considered high risk are: police officers, farmers, fire fighters, factory workers, construction workers, military personnel, heavy industry workers, musicians, and entertainment industry workers.
- Limit exposure time to noisy activities.

The longer you are exposed to hazardous noise, the more damaging it will be. If you work in a noisy environment, give your ears a break in quiet when you get home (i.e. do not go home and listen to loud music).

- When possible, turn down the volume (TV, radio, stereo, personal or portable music player, etc.).
- When it is not possible to reduce the level of occupational or recreational noise, wear hearing protection, i.e. disposable foam plugs, reusable silicone earplugs, earmuffs, or custom-made 'ear defenders.'
- When possible, buy quieter products (compare decibel ratings – the lower the better). This is particularly important when buying toys for children.
- Reduce the number of noisy appliances running at the same time in your personal environment.

Remember, one-third of hearing loss is preventable with proper hearing protection!

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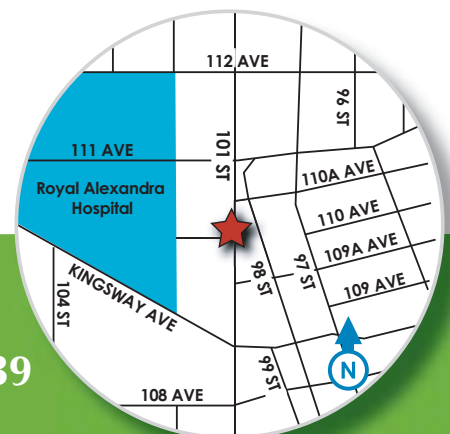
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