

Hearing Loss:

A permanent condition in a “temporary” culture

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Hearing loss. You think it inflicts only elderly people, right? Think again. Recent research reveals that more young people are developing *permanent* hearing loss, and they may not even realize it. According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), *20 percent of people aged 20-29 already have noise-induced hearing loss*. In a recent study of about 3,500 people who reported their hearing as “excellent” or “good,” one in four people were found to have *unsuspected* hearing loss.

Why is this such a concern? It’s because, unlike many other ailments, **hearing loss is permanent**. Over time, a loss of hearing in someone young will accumulate and exacerbate that person’s eventual age-related hearing loss. Experts predict hearing-related issues will be even more pronounced for the current younger generation when it reaches retirement age.

Which noises cause hearing loss? Anything over 85 decibels for an extended period of time, or much louder and shorter bursts of noise for a shorter period of time, are both damaging. Everyday noise from mowing the lawn, traffic, the food blender, leaf blowers and more, can all contribute to hearing loss. Loud, sudden noises, like sirens, fireworks, and gunfire, are able to damage hearing *immediately!* Concerts and prolonged noise (two hours or more), as well as workplace-related clamor are also to blame.

Which noises are higher than 85 decibels? According to a Purdue University Website, a garbage disposal, an average factory, a freight train 50 feet away, a diesel truck traveling at 40 mph at 50 feet away, and a food blender are all around 80 to 90 decibels. Exposing yourself to these for extended periods of time has been shown to cause hearing loss.

In the 90 to 110 decibel category are a jet plane taking off (at 1000 feet), a lawn mower, a motorcycle at 25 feet, an outboard motor, a car horn at three feet, a riveting machine, and live rock music. One brand of public bathroom hand dryer is 95 decibels. If you are “lucky” to be underneath a thunderclap, that will set you back 120 decibels! At 150 decibels, such as what occurs at 80 feet away from a jet taking off, your eardrums will rupture.

Wearing ear buds, as many people do with MP3 and blue-tooth devices, iPods, or video games, can intensify noise because they are put *directly into the ear canal*. This can raise noise levels by *nine* decibels. At maximum volume, ear buds can reach *105 decibels!* The marketing and sales of new audio products, such as wireless earbuds, just adds to the demand for these potentially damaging items, without clearly educating the consumer regarding the gravity of potential hearing loss.

What can you do to prevent hearing loss?

- [When listening to electronic devices, wear “noise-cancelling” headphones that *cover the whole ear*. Ear buds (which sit in the ear canal) tend to let other sounds in, thus making it necessary to turn up the volume.
- [If you insist on wearing ear buds, invest in *custom* ear buds that fit your ears. They have a tighter fit, and you won’t have to turn up the volume to hear with them.
- [The 60/60 Rule: Limit your ear-bud/ear-phone listening to under 60 minutes per day, and keep the volume under 60 percent.
- [Wear ear plugs at concerts.
- [Plug your ears with your fingers when an ambulance passes, during traditional gun salutes, or when the fire trucks blast their sirens at parades.
- [Don’t sit right under the annual fireworks without ear protection.
- [Wear ear protection when you know you will be exposed to loud noises for long periods of time, such as mowing the lawn.
- [Use paper towels in public bathrooms instead of the hand dryers.
- [In traffic, keep the windows rolled up.
- [Get your ears tested to find your baseline. Start taking precautions from now on.

Here’s your takeaway: There are many health conditions that are temporary and improvable by changing your lifestyle or by taking medicine. *But, hearing isn’t one of them. When it’s gone, it’s gone.*

For more information on premature hearing loss, visit these Web sites:

National Institutes of Health

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/news/2017/us-adults-aged-20-69-years-show-signs-noise-induced-hearing-loss>

CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/default.html

Center Point Audio: Earbud Safety

<http://www.centerpointaudio.com/Earbud-Safety.aspx>

Purdue University (List of Decibel Levels)

<https://www.chem.purdue.edu/chemsafety/Training/PPETrain/dblevels.htm>

Medline Plus (Medical Explanation of Hearing Loss)

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000495.htm>

Beltone.com

<https://www.beltone.com/en-us/hearing-loss/types-and-causes-of-hearing-loss/earbuds-and-hearing-loss>

Consumer Reports (Best Headphones to Prevent Hearing Loss)

<https://www.consumerreports.org/hearing-ear-care/headphone-types-to-help-prevent-hearing-loss/>

Restroom Direct

<http://www.restroomdirect.com/hand-dryer-noise-levels.aspx>

Audio Recovery, Inc.

<https://www.audiorecovery.com/blog/do-headphones-increase-your-risk-hearing-loss>

If you read this article to the end, and you would like to enter the Hilbert College Wellness Center monthly drawing, stop by the Wellness Center between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, or send an email with a brief description of what you learned, to wellnesscenter@hilbert.edu.