

Hearing loss

Noise-related hearing loss is usually irreversible

Keeping our hearing healthy is largely about knowing how much loud sound we are exposed to. Most cases of deafness are caused by damage to the tiny hair cells in the inner ear. This damage can be the result of too much noise, and it is permanent. The key is to avoid loud noise. The louder the sound, the less time we can safely listen to it.

Recreational loud noise is the main problem, especially from MP3 players, such as iPods, and noisy clubs and music gigs. That's thought to be why hearing loss is increasingly affecting younger people. You can lose some hearing after being exposed to loud noise for too long, for example by standing close to speakers at a nightclub.

You've been listening too loudly or for too long if you have ringing in your ears or dull hearing after listening to loud music.

"The best way to avoid developing noise-induced hearing loss is to keep away from loud noise as much as possible."

Hearing loss can also lead to other accidents. If you are listening to music on an MP3 player, texting or not paying attention it could be easy to become unaware of safety. Road accidents can be caused this way.

Tips for safer listening

1. Use earplugs

The louder the noise and the longer you're exposed to it, the greater the chance of damaging your hearing. Protect ears with ear protectors at live music events or fireworks parties.

2. Turn down the music

If the music is uncomfortable for you to listen to, or you can't hear external sounds when you've got your headphones on, then it's too loud.

3. Use the 60:60 rule

Listen to your music at 60% of the MP3 player's maximum volume for no more than 60 minutes a day.

4. Wear headphones

When listening to a personal music player, opt for noise-cancelling headphones, or go retro with older muff-type headphones.

5. Turn down the volume

Turn down the volume a notch. Even a small reduction in volume can make a big difference.

6. Be careful in the car

Listening to music in a confined space increases the risk of hearing damage.

7. Have a hearing detox!

Give the ears time to recover after they've been exposed to loud noise. According to Deafness Research UK, our ears need at least 16 hours of rest to recover after spending around two hours in a club.

Source: www.nhs.uk/Livewell/hearing-problems

Ear care tips

- Clean your ears with care. Wipe the outer ear with a flannel or damp cotton wool. Do not push cotton buds into your ears, these may injure the ear canal or eardrum.
- Earwax is the ear's mechanism for self-cleaning. If there is a build-up of wax that is blocking the hearing, see your GP.
- If there is itching or pain, consult your GP.
- If you have pierced ears, clean earrings and earlobes regularly with alcohol wipes.
- Reduce the risk of ear infections by treating ears, nose and throat infections promptly.

Action on Hearing Loss provide an online hearing check which is designed to help identify people who have hearing loss and encourage them to take action. It is a hearing check rather than a full hearing assessment so anyone who is concerned about their hearing check result should seek more detailed advice from a GP or audiologist. www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk