

October is National Audiology Awareness Month-- The American Academy of Audiology and the University of South Carolina's Speech and Hearing Research Center Remind the Public to Protect Their Hearing

Americans impacted by hearing loss hits record numbers

Columbia, SC – October 1, 2017— October is National Audiology Awareness Month and the American Academy of Audiology, and the University of South Carolina's Speech and Hearing Research Center are urging the public to be conscious of hearing health. A recent study by the Lancet commission on dementia, cited nine risk factors for causing dementia and hearing loss was listed as one of the causes. The report also stated that dementia typically starts many years before it is recognized. Hearing impacts the brain and cognitive thinking.

One of the factors in maintaining healthy hearing is being conscious of the degree and amount of loud sound exposure. Keeping track of sound exposure can protect hearing. Many cases of deafness are caused by damage to the tiny hair cells in the inner ear. The damage can be caused by too much noise, and it's permanent. Noise-related hearing loss is usually irreversible; however, steps can be taken to prevent this damage. One of the simplest factors to protecting your hearing is to avoid loud noise.

Outdoor activities can pose a threat to hearing health. More than 40 million Americans, aged 20 to 69, have some type of hearing loss with approximately 10 million of those attributable to noise-induced hearing loss—exposure to loud noise. The National Institutes of Health NIDCD states that approximately 28.8 million could benefit from the use of hearing aids. While age is often cited as a factor, there are growing numbers of younger people also reporting hearing loss.

The American Academy of Audiology states that noise above 85 decibels can damage hearing. To put that into perspective, noise from fireworks can reach up to 155 decibels. A jet plane taking off is estimated to be 150 decibels. Shooting a gun is around 140-175 decibels (depending on the gun). A rock concert, an MP3 player with the volume turned all the way up, a clap of thunder and ambulance sirens are all around 120 decibels. Movie action scenes in the theater have been known to reach 100 decibels. Compare these with normal conversation that is around 60-65 decibels.

Some Americans are exposed to loud noises on the job—landscape professionals, construction workers, road workers, all experience loud equipment. If you work or frequently spend time in a noisy place or listen to loud music a lot, you could be losing your hearing without even realizing it. And it isn't just the noise level, it's also the length of exposure. The louder the noise level, the less time you should be exposed to it. Lawn mowers are around 85 decibels but it's the length of exposure at that level that can be damaging. Chain saws are around 115-120 decibels.

Recreational loud noise is increasingly impacting younger people—earbuds, concerts, music in bars and restaurants, fireworks—all can be contributing factors.

You can lose some hearing after being exposed to loud noises for too long, for example by standing close to speakers at a nightclub. Or hearing can be damaged after a short burst of explosive noise, such as gunshots or fireworks. Home movie theaters are also dangerous to hearing because owners typically turn the volume up. The best way to avoid developing noise-

induced hearing loss is to keep away from loud noise as much as possible, the second way is to make sure you protect your hearing.

Here are some tips to protect hearing:

1. **Use ear protectors**—everyone should carry a set of ear plugs with them and use them, no matter how silly you may feel. In major cities, pedestrians are often exposed to damaging street construction noise. If you have to walk through a construction zone, use ear plugs or ear muffs and get away from the noise as quickly as you can. If you're forced to remain in a venue that is exceptionally loud, take breaks and get away so that your ears can rest and recover.
2. **Turn down the volume**—Don't turn your MP3 player up loud enough to drown out background noise when you're wearing earbuds or headphones. If the music is uncomfortable to listen to, or you can't hear external sounds, it's too loud. If you feel as if you have to shout over the television, it's too loud. Turn music and television down to the lowest volume possible where you can still hear it and enjoy it. Keep volume low in home movie theaters as well.
3. **Take ear breaks**—If you use earbuds or noise cancelling headphones to listen to music, take regular breaks and be sure not to use them for hours on end. Some people wear earbuds all day, even while working. They should not be worn more than 60 minutes without taking a break. Ears and hearing need break time to recover, even when the sound is low.
4. **Always use the manufacturer's recommended ear protection**—lawn care equipment, construction equipment and various types of machinery, as well as some sporting equipment come with manufacturer's recommendations to use ear protection—always read and follow the instructions. If you shoot a gun, hunt, fly a plane, participate in motorcycle or auto track racing or are simply a spectator, you should always use appropriate ear protection.
5. **Take ear protection when attending special events**—sports stadium noise can be loud and damaging. For any type of outdoor event or indoor concerts, take hearing protection along just in case and, if the sound is loud, use it.
6. **If you think you have hearing loss, see an audiologist.** Audiologists are experienced professionals with the ability to perform diagnostic testing and make recommendations. Some signs of hearing loss may include:
 - Ringing, buzzing, or hissing noises in the ear after the fireworks noise goes off.
 - Muffled hearing after the fireworks.
 - Suddenly having to turn up the volume of the television, radio, or stereo and having other family members complain that the volume is too loud.
 - Difficulty understanding people speaking to you and asking people to repeat themselves.
 - Difficulty with phone conversations and understanding the other person.
 - Sudden inability to hear the door bell, the dog barking, and other household sounds.
 - People telling you that you speak too loudly.
 - Ringing in the ears.

- Ear pain.

The USC Speech and Hearing Research Center recommends that, anyone experiencing the above symptoms should make an appointment with an audiologist. Contact them to make an appointment with an audiologist by calling 803-777-2717.

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to www.howsyourhearing.org