

Noise and Apps

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Is the world getting louder?

The world is becoming a noisier place, and more people have hearing loss because of it. Noise is one of the most common causes of hearing loss. The CDC estimates that 6% - 24% of (10 – 40 million) adults and up to 17% of teens have hearing test results that are suggestive of some exposure to / damage from noise. Every day we hear sounds that may damage our hearing. We are exposed to noise from machines, traffic, sporting events, music, concerts, etc.

Audiologists agree that continued exposure to sounds louder than 70 dBA has the potential to cause a permanent hearing loss over a long duration.

How do I know if I have a hearing loss?

Signs of hearing loss may include:

- Having a hard time understanding conversations, especially in loud places
- Turning up the television or radio louder than you used to
- Not wanting to talk to other people
- Ringing in your ears
- Having “fullness” in your ears

What loud sounds may cause hearing loss?

Sound is measured in decibels. Damage to hearing occurs when the decibels are too high, or when you listen to noise for too long. Below are examples of decibel levels.

- Whisper, quiet library—30 dBA
- Normal conversation, sewing machine—60 dBA
- Lawnmower, shop tools, truck traffic—90 dBA
- Chainsaw, pneumatic drill, snowmobile—100 dBA
- Sandblasting, loud rock concert, auto horn—115 dBA
- Gun muzzle blast, jet engine (such noise can cause pain, and even brief exposure injures unprotected ears)—120–149 dBA

Is there an app to measure sound?

With technology, we can now use our cell phones or other portable devices to measure sounds using special apps. Apps allow you to measure many different types of noise. You can find out how loud some everyday sounds are—like the noise made by your car, dog, television, or stereo. And you can measure sound in different places under different circumstances, like a sports arena when your team scores, a movie theater when the previews are on, or

a classroom when the teacher is talking to the students. Sound-level meter apps allow you to be more involved in your hearing health. Some can even alert you when the noise around you is too loud. Sound-level meter apps can range in price from “free” to \$99.99. Just because one app is more expensive than another doesn’t mean it is better. You should read reviews of sound-level meter apps to see which one is best for you. It is important to note that most of these apps do not meet the same standards as the equipment audiologists have in their offices. These apps should be used only to help you make better decisions about your hearing and hearing safety, so that you can better protect yourself from noise that can damage your hearing.

What else can I do to protect my hearing?

- Be aware of the noise around you. Know what noises are dangerous.
- Avoid being around loud sounds. If you can’t avoid exposure, wear earplugs, earmuffs, or other devices that dampen sound.
- Limit time exposed to noise—don’t listen to music at high volume for long periods of time.
- Turn down the volume on your personal listening devices. The World Health Organization recommends volume levels no higher than 80 dBA for adults and 75 dBA for children.
- Move as far as you can away from the noise source.

You cannot fix your hearing once it has been damaged. Hearing aids can help many, but a hearing aid cannot bring hearing back to normal. Sensorineural hearing loss, or hearing loss due to noise, is permanent, but preventable. Signs of hearing loss can include ringing or buzzing in your ears, muffled hearing, and difficulty hearing in noisy rooms or when people are at a distance. If you do think you have a hearing loss, make sure you have it checked by an audiologist. Even if you are not worried about your hearing, take advantage of hearing screenings offered in schools, doctors’ offices, or in the community. A hearing screening can alert you to early signs of hearing loss. Then you can follow up by taking steps to better protect your hearing.

