



# Preventing hearing loss

Hearing loss is a natural part of the ageing process. There are some steps you can take to make sure that you don't damage your hearing further.

## Why is protecting my hearing important?

Once you have lost your hearing, it won't recover. It is important to do what you can to minimise damage to your hearing so you can keep hearing well, for as long as possible. The better you hear the more able you are to continue to communicate easily with your family and friends, and to continue to enjoy music, television and other social activities.

## Protecting your hearing from noise

An important part of protecting your hearing is to make sure you don't expose yourself to damaging loud noise, or to limit your exposure to loud noise where you can.

### In the workplace

There are rules regarding exposure to loud sounds in the workplace. [Noise Regulations](#) state that workers should not be exposed to noise levels of 85dBA for more than eight hours and for louder sounds, even less time. No worker should be exposed for any length of time to sound greater than 140dB.

### Recreational noise

There are many recreational activities that involve exposure to loud noise and the rules that apply to workers for noise exposure can be applied to these activities also. Listening to loud music, whether it be to live bands or through a personal listening device, playing an instrument in a band, using power tools or mowing the lawn represent exposure to loud sound which can be damaging.

If you listen to a sound system through headphones or ear buds, it is important to keep the volume to a moderate level. A good rule of thumb is "If the person next to you can hear what you're listening to, it's too loud".

If you are in a loud noisy space such as a workshop for long periods of time you should take regular breaks from the source of the noise to give your ears a rest, or ask for ear protection to be provided if appropriate.

## **How will I know if my hearing has been damaged by noise?**

Ringing in your ears after being in loud noise is often the first warning sign of noise damage which could be permanent.

Other signs of hearing loss brought about by noise exposure (noise induced hearing loss) can include difficulty hearing certain sounds you used to be able to hear easily such as the phone ringing, or needing to turn up the television or having to ask people to repeat themselves. Even if your hearing is damaged you can prevent further loss by protecting your hearing.

## **How can I protect my hearing?**

Simple ways to reduce the effects of exposure to loud noise are by using hearing protection, as well as taking breaks from loud noise where you can, and by turning down the volume.

The best way to protect your hearing from loud sound is to wear ear plugs or ear muffs to reduce the loudness of the sound. Foam ear plugs can be bought from pharmacies or hardware stores. You can also have custom made noise plugs made by your hearing practitioner.

Musicians can invest in a pair of musician's ear plugs. These have a special filter which helps to reduce the loudness of damaging sounds without affecting your ability to hear the music properly. These are a worthwhile investment and are available from your hearing practitioner.

## **Protecting your ear from other types of damage**

Your ears have a wonderful self-cleaning system which helps to clear ear wax. Using cotton buds, hair clips or any other object to clean your ears is likely to disrupt this system and can easily cause an injury to your ear. The corner of a clean face-washer can be used to clean the ear and the outside of your ear canal. If you are concerned about wax build up, or you have any other concerns about your ear health, speak to your medical practitioner or hearing practitioner.

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