

Noise-induced Hearing Loss

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You are exposed to many sounds every day such as traffic, household appliances and music. If these sounds are too loud, they may hurt your ears and cause hearing loss.

Noise-induced hearing loss is hearing loss that happens because of exposure to loud sounds. It affects people of all ages.

How Sound is Measured

Sound is measured in units called **decibels**. The quietest sound an ear can hear is 0 decibels. Sounds that are at least 85 decibels can cause damage to your hearing. Use the decibel scale on the back of this page to see the decibel ratings for some common sounds.

How Hearing Loss Happens

When sound enters your ears, **hair cells** in your inner ear send signals to your brain. These signals have the information your brain needs to interpret the sound so you can hear it.

Hair cells are very sensitive. They can be damaged by:

- one single loud sound (firecracker, gunshot)
- exposure to loud sounds over time.

Once your hair cells are damaged, they cannot grow back and your hearing is permanently damaged.

Effects of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can affect your:

- ability to hear and have conversations

- mood (you may feel anxious or irritable)
- ability to concentrate, learn and perform well at work or school
- health. You may develop tinnitus (ringing in your ears), high blood pressure or other health problems.

Treatment

Talk with your health care provider if you think you may have hearing loss. He or she will likely refer you to an audiologist (hearing specialist) or otolaryngologist (doctor who specializes in ear, nose and throat care) for a hearing test. The test will help find out which part of your ear has been damaged.

There is no cure for hearing loss but it can be managed. Talk with your otolaryngologist or audiologist about your options.

How You Can Prevent Hearing Loss

You can help prevent noise-induced hearing loss by doing the following.

- Wear hearing protection (such as earplugs) when you are around loud noises.
- Move away from loud sounds (if possible).
- Turn down the volume of your television or music (especially with headphones).
- Give your ears a rest. Try to alternate between loud and quiet activities.

Whom to Call with Questions

Call your health care provider if you have any questions about hearing loss.

(over)

Decibel Chart

The louder the sound, the less time it takes to cause damage to your hearing. Use the chart below to see the decibel ratings for some common sounds.

Sounds that are at least **85 decibels** can cause hearing damage.

