



Helping people
hear better for
over 30 years

Listen Up, Teens!

March 2011

In a 2010 [study](#) published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers noted a 31% increase in teenage hearing loss over the last 15 years. For many of the teens surveyed only a slight hearing loss was indicated, but the trend is troubling because even if it does not impact their academics or social development now it may put them at risk for more significant hearing loss later in life (at even younger ages than previous generations).

Researchers could not identify one specific culprit for the rise in teenage hearing loss, but speculate that exposure to loud noise is a major contributing factor. MP3 players and iPods are often singled out for being potentially damaging to teens' ears, but noise exposure can be found in many other aspects of their lifestyles as well including: living in noisy cities, video games, shooting firearms, loud car stereos, motorcycles, crowds at sporting events, NASCAR races, concerts, power tools, and working summer jobs around loud equipment (farm work, factories, lawn mowing, amusement parks, etc).

The [National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders](#) is working to reverse the trend of increased hearing loss in this age group and suggests teens follow these steps to protect their hearing:

1) Know how to recognize hazardous noise levels.

The best rule to follow: if you have to shout to have a conversation at an arms length away (approximately 3 feet), you are probably being exposed to dangerous levels of noise. Check out this You Tube video for some other common sources of noise exposure:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L24ecL4ASXo>.

2) Turn down noise at the source when possible.

Turn that music down or follow these steps to set a safe volume limit on your iPod:

http://support.apple.com/kb/TA38403?viewlocale=en_US. When listening to music you should be able to hear a conversation easily over the music. Others should not be able to hear music coming from your headphones and should not have to shout for you to be able to hear them speaking.

3) Remove yourself from the noise source if you can.

The risk of damage to hearing depends on the duration and intensity of the exposure to noise. Hearing loss initially may only be temporary after exposure to high decibel levels, but if exposure occurs repeatedly the ears lose their ability to bounce back resulting in permanent hearing degeneration. When at concerts, sporting events or around loud equipment try to find a quiet place to give your ears a rest.

4) Wear ear protection whenever steps 2 and 3 aren't feasible.

Earplugs are ideal for recreational listening, mowing the lawn, or using loud tools or firearms. A variety of relatively inexpensive, disposable plugs can be purchased in retail drug or sporting goods stores. Look for a good snug seal, comfort and a minimum noise reduction rating of 22 decibels. Custom fit or high-fidelity plugs can be purchased through an audiologist and may be ideal for musicians.

Parents, educators, physicians and hearing health care professionals should view this study as a wake-up call to educate adolescents about the long-term dangers of exposure to loud noise and encourage them to follow these 4 easy steps so they can look forward to a lifetime of listening enjoyment.

Excerpts from:

<http://www.drif.org/magazine/46/Winter+2011/article/377>,

[http://appl003.lsu.edu/pubsafety/oes.nsf/\\$Content/Noise+Evaluation?OpenDocument](http://appl003.lsu.edu/pubsafety/oes.nsf/$Content/Noise+Evaluation?OpenDocument)

http://www.audiologyonline.com/news/news_detail.asp?news_id=4535

<http://www.earbud.org/index.html>