**SAFE LISTENING WEEK**

Last week of August.

**Newsletter and web articles about Safe Listening Habits.**

1. Australians with good hearing health are better able to lead fulfilling and productive lives.
2. 1 billion teenagers and young adults worldwide are at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening habits.
3. Loud sounds harm your hearing.
4. How can hearing be protected?
5. What is unsafe listening?

Australians with good hearing health are better able to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Many people develop hearing loss from prolonged exposure to loud sounds. It can occur in workplace, environmental or recreational settings.

Loud sounds damage ears and can lead to persistent tinnitus and hearing loss. The more exposure to loud noise, the worse it gets. It is mostly irreversible.

This type of hearing loss – also termed “noise-induced hearing loss” – affects the perception of high-pitched sounds, leading to difficulties in speech discrimination. People with this type of hearing loss often feel they “can hear the sounds, but not understand what is being said”.

When hearing loss is ignored it can have a bad effect on many aspects of life.

**Communication and speech.**

Unaddressed hearing loss affects the way people connect and communicate; this can have a profound effect on language development in children and hamper communication among adults.

**Cognition.**

Language deprivation can lead to delayed cognitive development in children, which can be avoided if suitable intervention is received during the initial years of life. In older adults, unaddressed hearing loss is associated with mental and physical declines and with higher rates of age-related dementia.

**Education and employment.**

Children with hearing loss may not get the best from their education if they don’t receive necessary supports. Adults with hearing loss also have a much higher unemployment rate. Among those with hearing loss who are employed, a higher percentage are in lower grades of employment, earn lower wages, or retire earlier than their hearing peers.

**Social and emotional.**

Although hearing loss contributes to social isolation and loneliness at all ages, these are experienced more specifically in people of older ages.

A reduced ability to understand auditory information and maintain conversations can lead to avoidance of potentially embarrassing social situations. Lack of social engagement and loneliness, especially in older people, may further contribute to cognitive decline and depression.

**Economic.**

Along with the distress experienced by individuals with hearing loss and the financial costs faced by families, unaddressed hearing loss results in an annual cost to Australia’s economy of $30 billion dollars. This includes costs for the health sector (which exclude costs of hearing care such as hearing screening, hearing aids, implants or rehabilitation); costs of educational support; and costs resulting from loss of productivity and taxes.

It is important to take care of your hearing to prevent hearing loss and related health problems. Our hearing is precious and fragile so it needs to be protected throughout our lives.

1 billion teenagers and young adults worldwide are at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening habits.

Throughout the world, nearly **50%** of people aged 12–35 years of age – that’s **1.1 billion young people** – are at risk of hearing loss due to prolonged exposure to loud sounds, through listening to music on smartphones and audio players, or at music gigs and clubs.

Here in Australia, nearly **50% of young people** are exposed to unsafe levels of sound from the use of personal audio devices.

Around **40%** of 12–35 year-olds are exposed to damaging sound levels at clubs and bars.

Practising safe listening is one of the simplest ways to prevent hearing loss that is caused by recreational exposure to loud sounds.

**Keeping the volume down.**

Listening to personal audio systems at a volume level below 60% of maximum is helpful in reducing the risk of hearing loss and tinnitus. Using noise cancelling headphones is also advisable.

**Limiting time spent engaged in noisy activities.**

Listening for a prolonged period of time can also damage hearing. When in nightclubs, bars, sporting events and other noisy environments, taking short listening breaks away from loud noise reduces the overall duration of noise exposure. Also, limiting the amount of time spent listening to personal audio devices will lessen the risk of hearing damage.

There is real risk of irreversible noise-induced hearing loss due to recreational exposure, especially in adolescents and young adults.

Love your music but protect your ears.

Loud sounds harm your hearing.

Exposure to noise causes a third of hearing loss in adulthood.

Sensory cells within our ears help us to hear. Exposure to loud sounds for any length of time causes fatigue of these sensory cells. The result is temporary hearing loss or tinnitus.

A person enjoying a loud concert may afterwards experience muffled hearing or a ringing or buzzing in their ears. This often improves as the sensory cells recover. However, with regular exposure, particularly to loud or prolonged noise, damage of the sensory cells and other structures can be permanent, resulting in irreversible noise-induced hearing loss, tinnitus, or both.

Other causes of noise-induced hearing loss include loud bursts of sound, such as fireworks, or continuous exposure to loud sounds over time, such as working with loud machinery.

Recreational activities that pose similar risks include riding motorcycles, listening to music at high volume when using earbuds or headphones, and regular or prolonged visits to loud entertainment venues such as music concerts or nightclubs.

Noise-induced hearing loss can be immediate such as when exposed to a sudden burst of loud sound; but more often the loss is gradual and unnoticed or ignored until the effects become more obvious. Sounds may become distorted or muffled.

It is important to take care of your hearing to prevent hearing loss and tinnitus. Promoting and practicing safe listening is one of the simplest ways to prevent the occurrence of hearing loss that is caused by recreational exposure to loud sounds.

How can hearing be protected?

The volume of sounds, the duration of listening, and frequency of exposure to loud sounds all have an impact on hearing. The higher the level of sound and longer the duration, the greater the risk of hearing loss.

Safe listening practices can go a long way to protecting your hearing while you are enjoying your activity.

**Keep the volume down.**

Listening to personal audio systems (devices such as smartphones or MP3 players through which music is played, and ear/headphones, as well as headphones with music playing capabilities) at a volume level below 60% of maximum is helpful in reducing the risk of hearing loss and tinnitus. Using carefully fitted, and if possible, noise cancelling headphones is also advisable.

**Limit time spent engaged in noisy activities.**

Listening for a prolonged period of time can also damage hearing. When in nightclubs, bars, sporting events and other noisy environments, taking short listening breaks away from loud noise reduces the overall duration of noise exposure.

Also, limiting the amount of time spent listening to personal audio devices will lessen the risk of hearing damage.

**Be aware of listening levels.**

Many devices, such as smartphone apps or listening software, use built-in safety features, such as volume limiting and sound level monitoring. These indicate precisely the levels of sound and duration of listening and provide an assessment of the potential danger of over-exposure.

**Protect ears from loud sounds.**

This can be achieved by wearing earplugs in noisy venues and moving away from sources of sound, such as loudspeakers.

**Heed the warning signs of hearing loss.**

It is crucial to not ignore early signs of noise damage.

* ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
* problems in hearing high-pitched sounds such as doorbells, phones or alarm clocks
* difficulty understanding speech especially over the telephone following conversations in noisy environments such as restaurants.

Regular hearing checks are recommended, especially for those listening to music regularly or visiting loud entertainment venues.

What is unsafe listening?

Unsafe listening refers to the common practices of listening to music or other audio content at loud levels or for prolonged time periods.

Sensory cells in the ears can start to become damaged by prolonged exposure to loud sounds.

Listening to sounds at 80 dB for 40 hours a week is the limit of safe listening. A sound of 80 dB is equivalent to the noise of heavy traffic heard inside a vehicle. The permissible time for safe listening decreases as sound levels increase. For example, a sound as loud as 100 dB – the level produced by a train – can only be listened to safely for less than five minutes each day.

Music at clubs and concerts is often as loud as 110 dB, and some headphones can play music equally as loud when the volume is close to, or at, maximum level. Even a short duration of exposure to levels of such high decibels can be harmful.

Habitual exposure over time almost certainly leads to tinnitus and hearing loss. The more exposure to loud noise, the worse it gets.

**The good news is that** hearing loss caused by noise can be avoided and prevented by simple safe listening habits.

* Keep the volume down.
* Limit time spent engaged in noisy activities.
* Be aware of listening levels.
* Protect ears from loud sounds.
* Heed the warning signs of hearing loss.

Safe listening practices can go a long way to protecting your hearing while you are enjoying your activity.