

Pointers for Parents

Noise-Induced Hearing Loss in Children and Teens

Of the 28 million Americans with some degree of hearing loss, one-third report that their hearing loss resulted partly from noise. Noise pollution is a part of our environment, a serious hearing hazard against which we need to protect ourselves. Approximately 30 million Americans are exposed to harmful noise levels on a regular basis, and teenagers are reportedly at the greatest risk because this age group listens to music at excessive levels for long periods of time.

Excessive sound can permanently damage our hearing without our being aware of it. Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is gradual and completely painless. While many types of hearing loss are associated with the aging process in adults, it is not commonly known that noise-



induced hearing loss in children and teenagers is on the rise. According to a national study, an estimated 12 percent of children ranging from ages 6 to 19 have NIHL. Loud noise can cause premature hearing loss, but this can be prevented.

Educate Your Children About Noise Hazards

It is important that children and teens develop good listening habits early and do not become conditioned to listening to sound at excessive levels. As a parent, take an active role in your child's hearing conservation and become more aware of noise pollutants in his daily environment. Repeated and unprotected exposure to loud stereos, boom boxes, noisy toys, lawn mowers, farm equipment or rock concerts can cause cumulative, permanent damage to a young person's hearing.

Pointers for Prevention

- Exposure to sound levels exceeding 85 decibels (dB) can cause permanent damage. An easy rule of thumb to follow: if you notice you are shouting in order to carry on a conversation, your environment is too loud.
- When you cannot control the volume or do not have earplugs with you, remove yourself from the scene and give your ears a 10-minute rest. Set aside quiet time during the day as built-in breaks from noisy activities.
- Test toys, tools and recreational items before buying them. If they hurt your ears, then they will most likely hurt your child's ears.
- A ringing sensation in the ears, a muffled sense of sound or difficulty hearing in the classroom and at home are some early warning signals.

Tests and Treatment

Just as you get an eye exam each year, make regular hearing tests an integral part of your family's healthcare plan. If your child is having difficulty hearing in school or at home, or constantly asks for things to be repeated, have his/her hearing tested by an otolaryngologist, who can also provide suggestions for lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of further loss. If hearing loss is present, a hearing aid may help. Many hearing aids are now available in fun colors, with glitter and glow-in-the dark features for greater appeal to youngsters. ❖

MORE INFORMATION

**The Children's CARE Center
House Ear Institute
(213) 353-7005**

A treatment and resource center for children with hearing loss providing a complete program of intervention and rehabilitation.

**Sound Partners
House Ear Institute
(213) 483-4431**

soundpartners@hei.org

An outreach program providing for hearing conservation information to music/audio professionals and the listening public. Track our latest hearing conservation news at www.hey.org.