



Topic: Hearing Loss

The music you play on your portable digital device may be costing you your hearing, now, and especially later in life.

The fact is our private lives are filled with noise: Concerts, portable music players, airplanes, trucks, cars, lawn mowers, power tools, even alarm clocks and televisions — a constant cacophony that's bound to take its toll.

Experts are alarmed by the rise in noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL). Doctors at the *Central Institute for the Deaf* in St. Louis say they are finding hearing loss in 12-year-olds of a kind that previously didn't occur until a person reached age 60.

Ten percent of junior and senior high school students show hearing loss, and the figure is increasing. A major threat to young people's hearing is the use of personal stereo systems at too high a volume.



Adults use loud machines in place of the quiet muscle power of previous generations. Instead of raking leaves, they use a blower. Instead of a rotary mower, they use power mowers. People are blasted with aerobics music instead of taking a quiet walk. About one in every 10 adults is regularly exposed to sound loud enough to impair their hearing either at work or at home.

Noise can destroy the cells in the inner ear. Sometimes damage happens all at once, like from a gun fired too close to someone's ear. That's called acoustic trauma.

With most NIHL, the damage occurs gradually. After repeated exposure to excessive noise, cells can't bounce back.

Here's how to protect yourself:

- +** Wear hearing protection. If you don't need it at work, use it when attending concerts or using noisy appliances.
- +** Earplugs and earmuffs are available at drug stores.
- +** Lower the volume. If your personal stereo can be heard three feet away, it's too loud.
- +** Skip loud events. Sit as far as possible from the speakers.