

HEARING LOSS RELATED TO LEISURE ACTIVITIES

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We are fairly well protected from hearing loss in most workplaces nowadays due to legislation. Workers are provided information on sources of noise in the workplace and with information on how to protect themselves from the noise. That information is not often applied to leisure activities. For some reason we tend to feel that once we leave the workplace, we are not likely to be exposed to noise levels that can cause hearing loss or perhaps we just don't feel the pressure to wear hearing protection outside of work.

So, how do we know whether that the level of noise is high enough to cause hearing loss? How do we know we have hearing loss? After all, when we are outside the workplace, we don't have access to sound level testing instrumentation. The level of regular speech is around 65 dBA. Here are some indicators that the sound levels are too high or that you are experiencing hearing loss:

- Ø If you have to shout to someone standing a meter away from you, the levels probably exceed 85dbA (the maximum exposure level while unprotected that is allowed by legislation)
- Ø If you have to shout to someone standing 30 cm away from you to be understood, then the levels probably exceed 95 dBA
- Ø If you have to shout into someone's ear to be understood, the sound levels probably exceed 105 dBA
- Ø If after a loud sound has stopped, you experience a temporary hearing loss such as

other sounds being muffled, quieter or less clear

- Ø If after a loud sound has stopped, you experience a ringing, buzzing, roaring, or rushing sound in the ear, you may be experiencing tinnitus.

To give you an idea of the noise levels we might experience in our leisure times check the following:

- Ø Power tools - 85–113 dBA
- Ø Home and car audio 84 –108 dBA
- Ø Music in dance bars 90 –110 dBA
- Ø Personal stereo systems (MP3, CDs, 60–114 dBA
- Ø Music in fitness classes 89 – 96 dBA

The duration of exposure also comes into play. For example: for a noise level of 105 dBA, five minutes a day would pose a significant risk. For a noise level of 85 dBA, over 8 hours a day would pose a risk. Impact noise (a big bang close to the ear) such as from a rifle, shotgun or firecracker can cause immediate and severe hearing loss that could be permanent.

Protect yourself by:

- Ø Limiting the amount of time you spend on excessive noise activities
- Ø Keep your music systems at a safe audio level
- Ø Wear hearing protection when operating noisy equipment (e.g. lawnmower, power tools, weed eater, etc.)
- Ø Allow time for your hearing cells to recover after being exposed to noise by doing quiet activities or resting.

If you are experiencing any type of hearing loss, see your doctor. Keep in mind that once the damage is done, there is no cure.