

Hearing Matters

By
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Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

Do you spend much time on a snowmobile? Do you spend much time listening to loud music from your own personal amplified device or at a noisy bar or school dance? Do you use a snow blower or a lawnmower without wearing ear protection? If you do, you might be susceptible to noise-induced hearing loss.

Noise-induced hearing loss is damaged hearing due to excessive exposure to loud sounds. When around loud sounds, one must consider the intensity of the noise as well as the length of time one is exposed to the noise.

Studies have shown that the most common cause of noise-induced hearing loss is an excessively noisy workplace. Heavy equipment operators, construction workers, military personnel, operators of farm machinery, and musicians are some of the professionals who are at a high risk of damaging their hearing. Of course there are many non-occupational sources of noise-induced hearing loss including high-volume music, snowmobiles, ATVs, and airplanes.

Even though there are regulations in Canada, at all levels of government, which guide environmental and occupational noise exposure, they don't cover all areas where excessive noise occurs. For example, there is no protection for bar patrons, people at youth dances, and for those at many public events. And even though regulations permit a noise level of 85 decibels for an eight-hour work day, they do not ensure that the public is notified of potential noise exposure.

A startling 23 per cent of people who reported hearing loss said it was due to noise exposure.

It used to be that noise-induced hearing loss was pretty much an adult complaint but audiologists are discovering that increasing numbers of young people are experiencing this type of hearing loss. Results have shown that it

is worse in boys than in girls probably because boys generally engage in noisier leisure activities. Of course, listening to loud music through personal amplification devices is a large contributor.

According to Heather Ferguson, president of the Hearing Foundation of Canada, people are starting to lose their hearing 20 years earlier than in the past. The number of people with hearing loss is expected to grow faster than the rate of increase of the senior population itself. It is truly becoming an epidemic problem for today's adults!

To put it all in perspective, consider these facts. An average conversation takes place at around 60 decibels. When you are using a hair dryer or a lawnmower, you are well into the danger zone at 90-plus decibels. Ipods can hit volumes of 120 decibels, which is louder than a chainsaw or jackhammer. Music in dance clubs can reach 150 decibels.

It is hard to avoid noise in this day and age. The bottom line is that you have to protect your own hearing by wearing earplugs when around excessive noise. They cost about \$15 at most hardware stores.

You would not hesitate to protect your eyes from danger. You should do the same for your ears.

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