

# The Telegram

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Health/Technology

## Listen for the warning signs

Personal music devices causing hearing loss in young people: health professional

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Special to The Telegram

If your teenager complains of an occasional ringing in the ears, it could be because their Mp3 player is turned up too loud.

It could also be the first indication that a more serious hearing problem may follow if the volume isn't lowered.

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association - Newfoundland and Labrador ([CHHA-NL](#)), is sounding the alarm that personal music devices are causing hearing loss. In most cases, executive director Leon Mills says, the damage is irreversible.

"We're extremely concerned about the unseen dangers of these iPods because people just do not appreciate or understand the dangers of noise where these personal music players are concerned," he says.

It's also of concern, he says, that people who use these devices may not realize that they are increasing the volume.

Oftentimes, it occurs over a period of time, he says.

"Some people are listening to music 10 to 12 hours a day. So, that constant exposure to noise, over time, is going to induce hearing loss."

Dr. Valerie Parrott is an audiologist and owner of Parrott's Hearing Clinic in St. John's.

She's definitely seeing more patients whose hearing has been affected by personal music devices, she says.

"Levels of hearing loss are shifting down decade-wise. So, it's not uncommon to have 20-, 30- and 40-year-olds with significant hearing loss that need amplification. Whereas, 30 years ago, we didn't see them until they were 50 or 60."

Parrott says the "big surge" in the number of people she's seeing is between the ages of 12 and 19.

"They come in complaining of ringing in their ears. That's one of the first warning signs of damage from high noise levels or music."

Parrott says the problem stems from the ear phones which are inserted close to the ear drum. This causes a higher sound pressure level between the edge of the ear phone and the ear drum.

"The effect of the volume is greater than if a speaker was across a room," she says.

Many of the Walkmans, Discmans, iPods and other Mp3 devices on the market today put out a sound level of about 110-125 decibels, she says.

"The nature of the ear is that music likes to be played at approximately 80 decibels to be enjoyed. But we consider 85 decibels damaging to hearing."

In response to concerns, Parrott says some manufacturers are now including a programmable output limit on their new devices.

"They're taking notice because you have musicians coming out who are saying, 'We don't want this next generation to be deaf like we are.'"

Mills urges young people in particular to heed the warnings of his organization about long-term affects of hearing loss. Such setbacks, he says, include social isolation and discrimination.

"There are a lot of negative consequences if you don't have good hearing. Your ability to be educated properly, your chances of finding and keeping good employment, getting promotions - all these things are affected," he says.

"And that's besides not being able to enjoy the everyday softer sounds that you're used to hearing, like hearing the birds."

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**Figure:**

Gary Hebbard/The Telegram

Memorial University of Newfoundland student Adam Power says he has no concerns that listening to music through headphones will damage his hearing. It's had no effect so far, he said, and he is careful to keep the volume at about the half-way point.

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