



## Maybe you're not being ignored...

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It's the "friends and family frustration" – talking when no one is listening. But what if you're not being ignored? Maybe they simply don't hear you anymore. In today's high-tech society, hearing loss is becoming more common at a much earlier age. Even people in their 20's are experiencing hearing deficits.

You see, noise is the enemy of hearing, and we are discovering it doesn't take much noise to cause temporary or permanent hearing loss. Most people lose their hearing slowly, over a 15- to 20-year period, because of regular, repeated noise exposure. Today, with high powered machinery, personal stereos with headphones, home gadgets, cell phones and firearms, that timeline is shrinking fast.

Unfortunately, our ears do not have a mechanism to prevent dangerous amounts of sound from getting to the inner ear. Over-exposure to sounds above 85 decibels (dB) may cause permanent hearing loss. Loud music, movies, work environments, and even televisions contribute to the current hearing loss epidemic. Sound levels at concerts ranges from 120 to 140 dB, well beyond the 100 db recognized as the threshold at which short-duration exposure causes hearing loss.

Wichita State University professor Ray Hull reports that up to 75 percent of high school seniors have the beginnings of permanent hearing loss. The volume of some of their headsets is over 115 decibels, which can cause permanent hearing damage in as little as seven and a half minutes. Even movies can be a problem, with sound levels as high as 118 decibels.

Some other common sources of loud sounds are...

- Snowmobiles -- 100 dB
- Sports stadiums -- 80 to 100 dB.
- Car horn -- 110 dB
- Baby's cry -- 115 dB
- Firearms -- 125-140 dB
- Motorcycle/Hair dryer/Lawn mower/Leaf blower -- 85-90 dB
- Wood shop/Chainsaw/Firecrackers (small) -- 100-110 dB
- Pneumatic drill/Ambulance Siren/Jet take off -- 119-140 dB

When tested for sound levels, the loudest noise sources on the farm were tractors, grain dryers and blowers, combines and chain saws. Harmful noises at home include vacuums, blow dryers for hair, garbage disposals, gas-powered lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and shop tools.

Fortunately, our ears often warn us when we have subjected them to potentially damaging sound levels. Temporary hearing loss and ringing in the ears are common signs. Another early indication is the inability to understand another person in a noisy environment, such as a restaurant. If you experience any of these symptoms, it's an almost sure indication of damage.

Noise-induced hearing loss is 100 percent preventable, but once it happens, hearing loss is permanent. Here are some hearing protection tips...

- Remove yourself from excessive noise. If you work in a loud environment, spend leisure time in quiet ones.
- Wear earplugs when you must work around loud noise, such as operating a lawn mower.
- Turn down your personal headset. If someone standing near you can hear the music from your headset, it's too loud.
- Don't use several noisy machines at the same time and don't try to drown out unwanted noise with other sounds. For example, don't turn up the volume on your car radio to drown out traffic noise or turn up the television while vacuuming.

The bottom line is this -- if you have to shout to be heard, the environment is too loud for your ears. Loudness is a habit that can be broken. Start breaking it today.

*Laura Strasser of Columbia Hearing Centers sees patients at the Wilbur Clinic on Wednesdays and the Davenport Clinic on Thursdays. For a free hearing exam or an appointment, call toll free 1-866-369-1020.*