

September 2018 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Hearing Loss: World-wide Increase-Risks-Protection

The World Health Organization in March on World Hearing Day warned that “one in 10 people globally, or more than 900 million, are at risk of disabling hearing loss by 2050 unless preventive action is taken now.” This is a 93 percent increase from the current number. The annual cost in direct health services and lost productivity as a result of disabling hearing loss is estimated at \$750 billion. Problems resulting from hearing loss are expected to rise because of a growing and aging population - a population that is expected to reach 9 billion by 2050.

What’s behind the increase? The majority of those with hearing loss are older adults, a growing population. Other hearing-harming culprits include exposure to loud sounds from personal audio devices (e.g., smartphones and iPods), rock concerts, loud bars, noisy workplaces, ear infections, side effects of certain medications, and the persistence worldwide illnesses such as measles, mumps, and rubella. Research studies are investigating the effect of hearing loss and cognitive decline in older adults as a factor that may increase the risk of depression and possible dementia.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that loud bursts of noise over time, even sounds that may seem innocuous, such as the constant hum of a loud window air conditioner or refrigerator, can cause damage. CDC organizes the causes under the categories: **everyday activities, events, and tools and more**. Everyday activities include music from listening devices (particularly when volume is set close to maximum), fitness classes, and children’s toys. Events include concerts, restaurants and bars, sporting events, motorized sporting events, and movie theaters. Tools and more include power tools, gas-powered lawnmowers and leaf blowers, sirens, firearms, and firecrackers.



Protecting one’s hearing. **Know what is risky.** “Experts generally agree that sounds exceeding 100 dBA—a level that can easily be surpassed by rock concerts, sporting events, movie theaters, gas lawn mowers and snow blowers, some MP3 players played at maximum volume, and fireworks displays—can be hazardous even in short bursts.” Suggestion: if a movie theater sound is too loud, talk with an attendant and ask for sound to be lowered. **Block out loud sounds** with earplugs or shield safety adjustable earmuffs. Using over-the-ear headphones—especially the noise-canceling kind—instead of earbuds may help prevent damage when using personal listening devices. **Make sure ears are clear** and are not blocked with impacted earwax. Wax buildup is more common in those who wear hearing aids due to lack of ventilation in the ear canals. Eating a nutritious diet may help protect against hearing loss by keeping blood vessels that supply nutrients and oxygen to the inner ear healthy.

Consider establishing a baseline of your hearing. Western Washington University’s Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic is a donation-based community clinic. Contact phone number is 360-650-3881. Costco offers free hearing tests.

Resources: https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss/what_noises_cause_hearing_loss.html
<https://www.consumerreports.org/hearing-ear-care/tips-for-preventing-hearing-loss/>
<https://www.voanews.com/a/world-health-organization-hearing-loss/4278903.html>