

Home, Community, and Recreational Noise

Exposure to damaging noise does not come only from the workplace. If you use personal audio devices, operate power tools for yard work, have a long daily commute in heavy traffic, or use a number of household appliances, you may be exposed to potentially damaging noise. Listening to noise levels regularly above 70 decibels (dBA) can cause hearing loss over time.

The following recreational activities can be dangerous for the ears:

- Hunting
- Target shooting
- Motorboating
- Waterskiing or using a personal watercraft
- Snowmobiling
- Motorcycle riding
- Woodworking
- Listening to music

Movie theaters, home entertainment centers, car stereo systems, health clubs, dance clubs, bars, and amusement centers also pose a risk to your hearing.

In our day-to-day activities, we can also be exposed to damaging noise when we use lawn mowers, hair dryers, blenders, power saws, weed trimmers, leaf blowers, food choppers/processors, and other convenience appliances.

Household Appliances Add Noise to Your Life

You race to your car after work and then spend an hour listening to the noisy rush of traffic. Once home, you adjust the air conditioner to the coolest setting and turn on the radio, making it loud enough to hear over the TV in the other room.

Then you rush into the kitchen to fix dinner. You turn on the oven and stove fan, toss some carrots in the food processor, and put your liquid diet meal in the blender with several ice cubes. You run the dishwasher, start the garbage disposal, and use the vacuum to clean up.

Dinner's almost ready, but instead of feeling pleased, you feel anxious and annoyed. It's not only the daily tension and flurry of activity that make you feel this way: It's also the NOISE you've created around you.

In fact, you have been surrounded by noise all day: your hair dryer, morning traffic, the office copier, your computer's printer, a lawn mower outside—even the loud music in your aerobics class made your ears ring!

High noise levels can cause hearing loss, especially when you are exposed continuously. Exposure to even moderate levels of noise can cause annoyance and anxiety and, over time, can damage hearing. To make matters worse, moderate levels of noise can also cause stress-related health problems, such as elevated blood pressure, fatigue, reduced sleep, increased frustration and anxiety levels, and even difficulty thinking.

Noise appears in places you don't even think about—like your kitchen. Audiologist Saralyn Gold, PhD, and students from the Department of Communicative Disorders at East Tennessee State University measured the noise level of six different types of appliances in 10 different kitchens (see chart below).

Appliance	Loudness Range (dBA SPL*)
Blender with ice	83.4–85.0
Blender w/ water	80.9–86.5
Dishwasher	65.4–78.0
Electric mixer	75.0–80.0
Pop-up toaster	66.6–84.5
Stove fan	65.1–76.5
Vacuum cleaner	81.1–94.5
*SPL = sound pressure level	

All of the blenders mixed with ice, one mixer, one toaster, the majority of the blenders with water, and many of the vacuum cleaners made noise levels higher than 80 dBA and loud enough to cause hearing loss if exposed over a long period of time. One of the vacuum cleaners created noise higher than 90 dBA. Most of the appliances generated enough noise—more than 60 dBA—to create annoyance.

What Can You Do?

Make noise level a part of your buying decisions. Many appliances—dishwashers, fans, disposals, cleaners—create a wide range of noise. Check to see whether appliances come with decibel ratings, and check the ratings specified in consumer publications.

Express your concern about noise. When shopping, tell the salesperson that you do not want to buy brand X because of the noise. Write to the manufacturer.

You can also write to government organizations, such as the Consumer Product Safety Commission, about the need for quieter appliances.

Noisy Toys, Dangerous Play

Parents may think that noise is a problem they do not need to worry about until their child reaches the teenage years. Not so. Some toys are so loud that they can cause hearing damage in children.

Some toy sirens and squeaky rubber toys can emit sounds of 90 dBA. These sounds can be as loud as a lawn mower. Workers would have to wear ear protection for similarly noisy sounds on the job.

The danger with noisy toys is greater than the 90-dBA level implies. When a noisy toy is held directly to the ear,

as children often do, the toy actually exposes the ear to as much as 120 dBA of sound, a damaging dose—the same as a jet plane taking off. Noise at this level is painful and can result in permanent hearing loss.

Be Safe

Toys that pose a noise danger include cap guns, talking dolls, vehicles with horns and sirens, walkie-talkies, musical instruments, toy vacuums, and toys with cranks.

- Parents who have normal hearing need to inspect toys for noise danger just as they would for small pieces that can be easily swallowed.
- Prior to purchasing a new toy, listen to the toy. If the toy sounds loud, it should not be purchased.
- Toys already at home should also be examined. Batteries can be removed or toys discarded if they are too noisy and pose a potential danger to hearing. If you are concerned about your child's hearing, be certain to have his or her hearing tested by an audiologist.

NOTES:

For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit www.asha.org/aud/pei/.

For more information about hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

2200 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850
800-638-8255

E-mail: actioncenter@asha.org
Website: www.asha.org

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American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

2200 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850 • 800-638-8255

