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NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS

Exposure to loud noise is the second biggest cause of hearing loss, after age-related damage to the inner ear.

What is noise-induced hearing loss?

Noise-induced hearing loss is caused by prolonged exposure to excessive levels of noise – for example, in noisy workplaces, or while listening to loud music. It can also be caused by extremely loud bursts of sound such as gunshots and explosions that can lead to some damage within the ear structures. You might not notice the effects of noise-induced hearing loss until years after you were first exposed to loud noise. Some people experience tinnitus as the first sign that their hearing has been damaged by noise.

How can I tell if sounds are too loud?

Noise levels are usually measured in dB(A), a decibel scale that reflects the sensitivity of human ears to different levels and pitches of sound. Long exposure to sounds over 80dB(A) can damage your ears.

In practical terms, this means that if you can't talk to people about two metres away without shouting because of background noise, the noise levels could be hazardous. If you go somewhere where the level of sound hurts your ears, you should leave.

How does noise exposure affect your hearing?

If your hearing loss is caused by exposure to noise, you will experience a dip in your hearing in the high frequencies, which means that you can't hear these pitches as well as others. If the noise exposure continues, this dip will spread and affect lower and higher frequencies too. As it gets worse and affects a wider frequency range, you will find it difficult to follow conversations if there is background noise. Later you may find it difficult to follow what someone is saying, even in a quiet room.

What can I do about noise-induced hearing loss?

Hearing aids may be beneficial as they could improve your hearing in a range of everyday situations, make conversations easier and reduce your awareness of any tinnitus. However, hearing aids can't restore your hearing to normal, so it's important to prevent your hearing from being damaged by noise in the first place. Try to avoid loud sounds at work, at home or when you go out.

To find out more about preventing your hearing from being damaged by noise at work, loud music or noisy activities, plus, how to choose the right hearing protection and protecting your child's hearing, visit our [look after your hearing section](#).

<https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk>