

Misuse of Ear Buds Could Blossom into Hearing Loss

Concern is particularly acute among millennials

Did you get a new smartphone for Christmas? Did it come with ear buds?

You'll want to listen to what an expert has to say before you have trouble listening at all.

Dr. Megan Haas is an audiologist for OSF HealthCare Medical Group in Escanaba, Michigan. She says millennials are using ear buds more frequently than any previous generation and it's leading to a 30-percent greater risk of hearing loss among those ages 18 to 34.

"Ear buds sit directly in the ear canal," says Dr. Megan Haas, audiologist for OSF HealthCare Medical Group - Ear, Nose and Throat, in Escanaba, Michigan. "So, they actually produce sound nine decibels higher than earphones. The other issue with ear buds is that, when there is background noise, 90 percent of people are turning up the sound to compensate to hear over the lawn mower, over the car, and that is causing greater noise-induced hearing loss."

Dr. Haas encourages parents to warn their kids about the dangers of listening to any media at high volume and to take some control how children are using technology. For instance, most smartphones or computer pads allow for parents to pre-set and lock the volume at a less harmful level.

"The other thing that you should remember is the 60-60 rule," says Dr. Haas. "So, you should never turn up your device more than 60-percent and you should never let your children listen to it for more than 60 minutes per day."

Dr. Haas says the first symptom of a hearing problem or damage is ringing in the ears. But, she advises not waiting until a problem is detected before seeing an audiologist.

"It's always good to get a baseline hearing test," says Dr. Haas. "So that, if in the future, something happens we have a hearing test to compare it to. However, most people, once they have diagnosed hearing loss, we recommend a yearly hearing eval to monitor and make sure it's not progressing too rapidly."

As for proactive prevention, Dr. Haas suggests buying ear phones, because they are not inserted into the ear canal. And she says noise-cancelling ear phones or ear buds are also plus.