

Script – Print – What’s all that noise about?

Chris Workman, an audiologist with OSF HealthCare, loves to crank up his music from time to time. But since it’s his profession, he knows the dangers of loud noise and the lasting impact it can have on his hearing.

“It stirs some emotion. It gets you pumped up,” says Dr. Workman. “It gets you if you’re working out, you might crank some music. Some folks will listen to music for other emotions. Maybe they’re feeling a different way, and cranking a song will bring them out of that depression or whatever they’re going through.”

But our listening habits could be doing more harm than good. Especially for younger people. A recent [study](#) published in the BMJ Global Health Journal cautions that between 670 million and 1.35 billion teens and young adults could face hearing loss due to unsafe habits.

The study analyzed data from 33 studies covering more than 19,000 people between the ages of 12 to 34. Researchers concentrated on two main sources of loud music exposure: Live music events and personal listening devices, like headphones and earbuds.

Listening to sounds at a decibel level of 85 or higher for long or a repeated amount of time can cause hearing loss.

Researchers found that 24% of young people listen to their devices at volumes high enough to harm their hearing. And 48% are exposed to unsafe sound levels at concert venues. Listening at high volumes can lead to noise-induced hearing loss as well as lifelong hearing problems like tinnitus, which is a constant ringing noise in your ear.

“Most of our kids are walking around with headphones in their ears. Athletes are walking around with headphones in their ears,” says Dr. Workman. “They’re listening to something multiple hours a day, some of which is at loud levels, which, over time, is going to do some damage to their hearing.”

Dr. Workman doesn’t see many young adults in his practice. But when he does, he makes sure to give them a reminder about taking care of their hearing. Ongoing bad listening habits can lead to problems within 10 years.

“I’m all for listening to some loud music. I like it myself, but I know to do it in short durations, crank a couple songs, turn it down, or take them off. Give your ears a break,” he says. “That way you’re letting those hairs in the inner ear come back and protect them from any permanent damage.”

Dr. Workman offers a few helpful tips. “Encourage them to work hearing protection around loud noise. If they’re going to a concert don’t sit up front. Back away a little bit. If you do sit close, wear some hearing protection. You can get an inexpensive pair online for \$20. That will help make the music sound normal at a reduced level.”

The best place to start is getting a hearing test to establish a baseline. Dr. Workman recommends testing for people as young as 20-25. In addition to loud noises, there are other reasons for hearing loss such as aging, genetics, certain medications and diseases like diabetes.

Dr. Workman says the bottom line is to use common sense when it comes to your hearing. Afterall, the last thing you want as a young person is to be fitted for hearing aids.

"A lot of us feel invincible at that age, so we tend not to take that message to heart," he adds. "Hopefully they understand the potential damage they could do."

For more information on audiology services, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).