

One third of all Canadians over 65 have a hearing loss. This is not, however, just an issue with the senior population; younger people are affected too. In fact, ten per cent of all Canadians have some type of hearing loss. Could you be at risk? Some of the most common causes for hearing loss are outlined below.

NOISE EXPOSURE

In our world of technology, everyday life is comprised of hazardous noise levels. At home we are exposed to noise from lawn mowers, traffic, and construction. At work noise is generated by the chatter of students and colleagues, music or physical education activities, office or industrial equipment, power tools or other machinery. Even our leisure activities can be noisy, including hunting, sporting events, snowmobiling and listening to loud music.

The loudness of sound is measured in decibels. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety recommends ear protection for people exposed to sounds of 85dB or higher. Otherwise you risk permanent hearing loss. Some of the activities you engage in daily may be noisier than you think.

Take a look at these decibel ratings for some common sounds:

- ❖ Ambulance siren: 120 dB
- ❖ Nightclub: 120 dB
- ❖ Movie Theatre: up to 117 dB
- ❖ Rock Concert: 110-125 dB
- ❖ Listening to music with headphones: 105-120 dB if the volume is cranked up to maximum setting.
- ❖ Motorcycle: 95dB

Warning signs of damage due to noise exposure include ringing or buzzing in the ears (tinnitus), slight muffling of sounds, difficulty understanding speech, and difficulty understanding conversations in groups or with background noise. If you experience any of these warning signs, do not wait: see an audiologist for a complete hearing test.

AGING

Although people of all ages can be affected by hearing loss, the risk increases with age. The cause for age-related hearing loss is not always clear. Sometimes it is related to a life time of noise exposure while other times a genetic component is involved.



MEDICAL CONDITIONS /INJURIES

Hearing loss can be the result of a medical condition, i.e. ear infections, damaged ear drums, certain tumours (such as those that grow on the nerves responsible for hearing) and Meniere's disease (a condition that damages the inner ear leading to hearing loss and vertigo). Other possible causes for hearing loss include the build up of ear wax, certain medications (such as antibiotics and cancer treatments), and head injuries or trauma to the ear.

TIPS TO PREVENT HEARING LOSS

Protect your hearing because it is irreplaceable. Once hearing is damaged it often can't be restored. Some tips to protect you from noise induced hearing loss include:

- ❖ Watch your decibels!!! Avoid exposure to noise when you can.
- ❖ Wear ear plugs, noise filters, or ear muffs if you are in an environment with noise over 85 dB. If you have to shout to be heard or if speech sounds are muffled after leaving a noisy environment, then the sound level is too high.
- ❖ Wear the recommended ear protection if you work in a noisy

environment and if you are exposed to noisy situations at home, or during leisure activities (such as discos, sporting events, or rock concerts).

- ❖ Follow the 60-60 rule for when using your personal music device (MP3 or CD player): listen 60 per cent of the maximum volume for up to 60 minutes per day. Any more then this can lead to permanent hearing loss.

Other suggestions on reducing your risk for hearing loss include:

- ❖ Don't try to clean your ears by poking anything into the ear canals...this may result in injury to the delicate skin or impacting the ear wax.
- ❖ Reduce the risk of ear infections by treating upper respiratory tract infections promptly.
- ❖ Avoid swimming in dirty water.
- ❖ Dry your ears after bathing.

If you are concerned that you may be at risk, talk to your doctor. Some medical conditions can be treated to improve hearing. Have regular medical checkups to find health conditions and nip them in the bud. Talk to your doctor about booking a hearing test. The Canadian Hearing Society recommends a hearing test every two years or more often if you have concerns about your hearing.

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