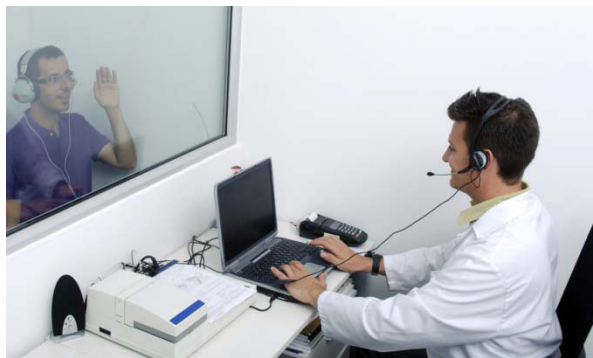


FACT SHEET

Ear Care and Hearing Protection

Routine ear care and the use of hearing protection are essential to preserve your quality of life. Health and safety professionals recommend the following actions to protect your hearing.

Ear Care



If you haven't had your ears checked lately, now's a good time, especially if you are having difficulty hearing. During a visual examination, your provider will look for signs of infection and any abnormalities before a hearing test is administered.

A hearing test, or audiogram, is typically conducted in a lab, sound-proof room or booth in a clinic, mobile medical unit, school or workplace. The test may be performed by an audiologist, certified occupational hearing conservationist, nurse, audiometric technician or other qualified health professional.

Warning Signs

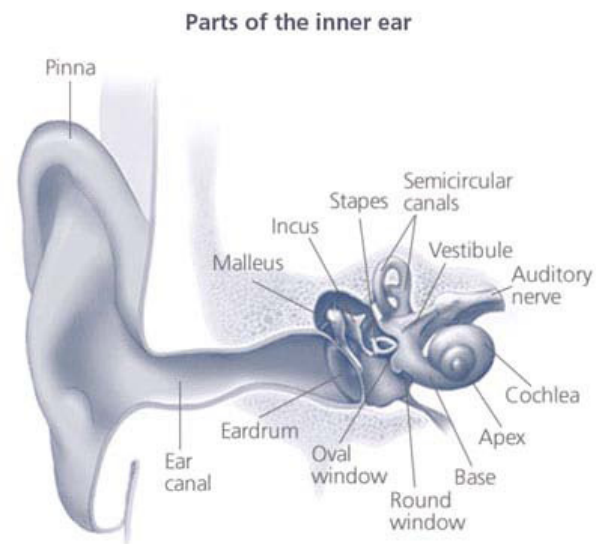
Warning signs of hearing loss include:

- Difficulty hearing on the telephone
- Cranking up the TV, radio or stereo volume

- Frequently asking people to repeat what they have said or feeling that they are mumbling
- Withdrawing, reading lips or making inappropriate comments in social situations
- Inability to hear environmental sounds others can hear, such as birdsong
- Imbalance, buzzing or ringing in your ears

Exposure Risk

People of all ages can develop noise-induced hearing loss. Approximately 15 percent of Americans between the ages of 20 and 69 (26 million people) reportedly have hearing loss that may have been caused by exposure to noise at work or in leisure activities.



Source: National Institutes of Health Medical Arts

Exposure to high levels of noise can result in permanent hearing loss that cannot be corrected with surgery. Noise exposure is

FACT SHEET

Ear Care and Hearing Protection



linked to a condition called [tinnitus](#), which causes ringing, buzzing or muffled sounds in the ears or head. Tinnitus may subside over time, but it can continue constantly or occasionally throughout a person's life.

Noise-induced hearing loss limits the ability to hear high-frequency sounds and communicate through speech. Lack of protection from loud noise contributes to fatigue and physical and psychological stress, reduces productivity, and interferes with socialization, communication and concentration. The risk of workplace accidents and injuries increases when it is difficult to hear warning signals and other sounds.

Cleaning

To clean the outer ear, use a tissue or apply a warm washcloth. Pierced ears, earrings and earlobes should be cleaned with rubbing alcohol to prevent infection. Medical professionals advise against using cotton-tips or other small objects to clean inside your ears because they may injure the ear canal or eardrum. Earwax is a self-cleaning mechanism. However, your medical provider may recommend a procedure to remove wax from ear canals.

Illness and Medications

Promptly seek a medical evaluation if you have ear drainage or an upper respiratory complaint that could increase the risk of an ear infection. Be aware of any medication side-effects that may impact your hearing or balance.

Hearing Protection

Noise is pervasive and one of the most common and preventable causes of hearing loss and occupational illness. On or off the job, consistent use of hearing protection (e.g., ear muffs, foam and preformed ear plugs, canal

caps) helps reduce exposure to noise that can cause temporary or permanent hearing loss.

Commonly encountered noise-generators include gardening and carpentry tools; various modes of transportation, traffic congestion and vehicle horns; loud music – live or recorded; firearms used for hunting and target practice; construction and farming equipment; and machinery in manufacturing facilities.

Noise is pervasive and one of the most common and preventable causes of hearing loss and occupational illness.



In many workplaces, mandatory hearing tests are used to establish a baseline and any changes in hearing over time. Noise is measured in decibels (dBA) using sound levels that closely match the perception of loudness by the human ear.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers in general industry to establish an effective hearing conservation program – including testing – when worker noise exposure is equal to or greater than 85 dBA for an eight-hour period (90 dBA over eight hours in the construction industry).

In addition to free annual testing, OSHA-mandated hearing conservation programs require employers to measure noise levels, provide free hearing protection and training to employees, and evaluate the adequacy of hearing protection unless changes to tools, equipment and schedules (engineering and administrative controls) are made to keep noise under the permissible exposure limit of 85 dBA per eight-hour period.

Additional Precautions

- When listening to music or watching TV, it's highly advisable to keep volumes at a reasonable level, especially when wearing earphones or ear buds, to reduce hearing loss risk.
- When buying appliances and household tools, compare dB ratings and consider low-noise products.
- Wear a helmet during any activity that puts you at risk for head and ear injuries
- If you swim, surf, scuba dive or fly, practice proper techniques to equalize ear pressure.
Earplugs with special filters can be purchased to help equalize air pressure in ears when airborne.



Resources

1. [Better Hearing Institute](#)
2. [Cleveland Clinic Ear Care Tips](#)
3. [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#)
4. [OSHA occupational noise standard](#)
5. [OSHA hearing conservation program](#)
6. [WorkCare.com](#)