

Keeping an Ear Out For Hearing Loss

State Compensation Insurance Fund

Most of us take our hearing for granted, especially when we're young. We assume that hearing loss is unavoidable and is part of the aging process. However people who live in other parts of the world without the everyday noises of our industrial society have little or no hearing loss as they grow older.

Hearing loss in older people is not due to aging but exposure to noises over a lifetime. These noises can come from TV, traffic, machinery, and other loud sounds. Earphones have been known to be very destructive to hearing. In industries such as construction there are many sources of loud noises, which can be from equipment, such as circular saws, grinders, compressors, lift trucks, transportation equipment, and air or electric power tools.

What's the difference between sound and noise? Noise, is unwanted sound. It's unwanted because it can cause hearing loss; keeping you from hearing people talk or hearing emergency sounds. It can also disrupt job performance and cause stress-related problems, like cardiovascular changes, fatigue, irritability, and tension.

When is noise too loud? It's too loud, if:

- You have to raise your voice to be heard.
- You can't hear someone less than 2 feet away without shouting.
- Speech around you sounds muffled or dull after you leave a noisy area.
- You have ringing in your ears after exposure to noise.

Both the amount of noise and the length of exposure affect its ability to damage hearing. Hearing loss can happen so gradually that people may not notice their hearing is being affected until it's too late. By then, even a hearing aid may not help. Protect yourself; don't risk losing some of your hearing when it can be easily protected. You may be unable to prevent noise but you can minimize hearing loss by following established safety procedures and using appropriate hearing protection. Use earplugs or earmuffs when noise levels are high. Silence is not always golden, especially when it's permanent. ®