



# Workplace Noise Safety



Helping you to understand the risks of noise-induced hearing loss and how to manage them in the workplace.



THE RISKS OF NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS



HOW TO STAY WITHIN YOUR WEEKLY SAFE LISTENING ALLOWANCE



HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HEARING



NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR  
**Deaf & Hard of Hearing**



# GETTING ON TOP OF NOISE

Noise Safety is an integral part of the Hearing Accredited Workplace Programme. The booklet will help you to understand the risks of noise-induced hearing loss and how to manage them in the workplace.

Learn about:

- The risks of noise-induced hearing loss
- How to stay within your weekly safe listening allowance
- How to protect your hearing.

## WHAT IS NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS?

Everyone has a weekly sound allowance their ears can manage. The louder the sound, the less time you can safely listen.

Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) occurs when loud sounds (either continuous and/or a one-time exposure) damages sensitive structures in the inner ear. The first signs of damage are ringing in the ears, muffled hearing or pain in the ears after noise exposure.

After a period of time away from the noise, hearing may fully restore. However, with ongoing exposure to hazardous noise, the ear will gradually lose its ability to recover and the hearing loss will become permanent.

Permanent hearing loss results from the destruction of hair cells in the inner ear. These cells cannot be replaced or repaired by any presently known medical treatments or technology.



Noise induced hearing loss can occur at any age depending on how loud, how long and how often you are exposed. All ears are different, and some ears are more fragile than others. It's impossible to know how rapidly or to what degree your hearing might be affected by noise.

**It's never too early to look after your ears.** Read on to learn about noise induced hearing loss and to discover some simple steps you can take to help make listening safe.

## MANAGING THE RISKS RELATED TO NOISE WILL ASSIST WITH:

- protecting workers from hearing loss and disabling tinnitus.
- improving the conditions for communication and hearing warning sounds.
- creating a less stressful and more productive work environment.

## WHAT INFORMATION DO YOU NEED TO PROVIDE THE TEAM?

- The impact on their health from hazardous noise.
- How hearing can be affected by hazardous noise.
- Responsibilities of workers, managers, supervisors and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs).
- Dangerous tasks and the level of hazardous noise they could be exposed to.
- How to identify and report hazardous noise levels.
- How to report faulty or damaged hearing protection and noise control equipment.
- How to choose, fit, wear, maintain and store hearing protection.
- Where and when to wear hearing protection to ensure hearing is not harmed at work.
- How and when to use noise control measures.
- For more information, see WorkSafe's guidance on training.

For more information, see WorkSafe's website:

[www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/noise/noise-whats-the-problem](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/noise/noise-whats-the-problem)





# ARE YOU BEING EXPOSED TO DANGEROUS DECIBELS?

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**Exposure to any noise over 80 dB for an extended period of time can damage hearing.**

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As well as hearing loss, persistent noise stress can increase the risk of fatigue and cardiovascular disorders including high blood pressure and heart disease.

It is important to monitor noise levels in the workplace to ensure that employees are not being exposed to noise levels in excess of 80 dB.

Any required workplace activities that are in excess of 80 dB, need to be monitored and managed to minimise employee exposure to dangerous noise levels.



# WHAT HAPPENS TO MY EARS WHEN I LISTEN TO LOUD SOUNDS?

It can help to think of the hair cells in your ears being like a fresh patch of grass and loud music being like a group of people trampling on the grass. Before anyone walks on the grass, the blades **stand up right** and **tall**. But, as people continue to walk on the grass the blades become flattened.



If people stop walking on the grass, after a few days, **some blades of grass might pop back up and stand straight again.**



But, if people continue to trample over the same patch of grass, the grass begins to die, and the **damage becomes permanent.**



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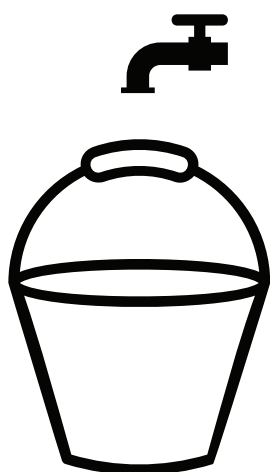
Some of the first signs that you have damaged your hearing after listening to loud sounds are:

- Ringing in the ears
  - Sore or sensitive ears
  - Everything sounding muted or dull
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# DID YOU KNOW THAT YOUR EARS HAVE A WEEKLY SOUND ALLOWANCE?

If you want to look after your hearing for life then it's important to be aware of how loud and for how long you can safely listen.

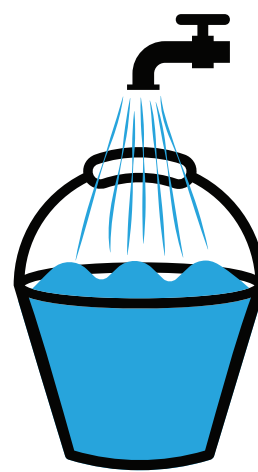
Think of your weekly sound allowance like a 20-litre bucket of water.



You can fill it up slowly over the week with just a couple of litres each day.









Or you can fill it up with 20 litres all in one go.



Filling the bucket up all in one go is like listening to music on max volume. This means you'll use up all your weekly sound allowance very quickly.

# SAFE LISTENING WEEKLY ALLOWANCES

Are you wondering how much noise is too much?  
Stay in the safe zone by following the  
World Health Organisation's guide.

Decibels	ADULTS	Weekly Limit*
110 dB - Max Volume on Smartphone 	115 dB	Protection required
	107 dB	4.5 mins
	95 dB	75 mins
88 dB - Blender 	89 dB	5 hrs
	86 dB	10 hrs
	80 dB	40+ hrs
	77 dB	40+ hours
65 dB - Typical Speech 	75 dB	40+ hrs
	65 dB	40+ hrs
		95 dB - Hair Dryer 
		85 dB - City Traffic 
		75 dB - Half Volume on Smartphone 

Remember: If you think it's too loud then it probably is.



# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR TEAM'S HEARING

## FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO MANAGE NOISE IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Identify the sources of noise.
- Remove the noise at source, i.e. choose the quietest equipment for the job.
- If you can't remove the noise at source...put the noisy machinery in a separate room.
- Reduce how far noise can travel by reducing reflected sounds through noise absorption materials.
- Reduce the noise where people are.
- Train your team to protect their hearing and rotate noisy tasks to give ears a break.
- Remember, hearing protection is the least effective control.
- Look at removing and reducing noise first - if risk remains provide the right hearing protection.

Source: WorkSafe New Zealand. For more information visit:  
[www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/noise](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/noise)









**Helping you and your team to become more  
inclusive of hearing loss in the workplace.**



**HEARING ACCREDITED**  
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