Hearing Loss Prevention Tips

Information taken from http://www.webmd.com/

The most common forms of hearing loss in adults are:

- Age-related hearing loss or presbycusis. This is caused by a slow breakdown of tiny hair cells in the ears that takes place as you get older.

- Noise-induced hearing loss. This comes from exposure to loud noises over time that damage tiny hair cells in the ears. These cells pick up sound vibrations and send signals to the brain.

**Effects of Noise**

The effects of noise on hearing vary among people. Some people's ears are more sensitive to loud sounds, especially at certain frequencies. (Frequency means how low or high a tone is.) But any sound that is loud enough and lasts long enough can damage hearing and lead to hearing loss.

Noise levels are measured in decibels (dB). In general, sounds above 85 dB are harmful, depending on how long and how often you are exposed to them and whether you wear hearing protection, such as earplugs or earmuffs. As loudness increases, the amount of time you can hear the sound before damage occurs decreases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise levels</th>
<th>Average decibels (dB)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves rustling, soft music, whisper</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average home noise</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal conversation, background music</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office noise, inside car at 60 mph</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vacuum cleaner, average radio</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy traffic, window air conditioner, noisy restaurant, power lawn mower</td>
<td>80–89 (sounds above 85 dB are harmful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subway, shouted conversation</td>
<td>90–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boom box, ATV, motorcycle</td>
<td>96–100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School dance</td>
<td>101–105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chainsaw, leaf blower, snowmobile</td>
<td>106–115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports crowd, rock concert, loud symphony</td>
<td>120–129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock car races</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun shot, siren at 100 feet</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Signs and Symptoms of Hearing Loss**

- You have difficulty talking or hearing others talk over the sound.
- The sound makes your ears hurt.
- Your ears are ringing after hearing the sound.
- Other sounds seem muffled after you leave an area where there is loud sound.

Most cases of noise-induced hearing loss are caused by repeated exposure to moderate levels of noise over many years, not by a few cases of very loud noise. Wearing hearing protectors can help prevent damage from both moderate and loud noise.
High-risk Careers for Hearing Loss

If your workplace has harmful noise levels, plan ahead and wear hearing protection. People who may be regularly exposed to harmful noise because of their jobs include:

- Those who work with loud machines, vehicles, or power tools, such as construction workers, factory workers, farmers, truck drivers, mechanics, or airport ground crew workers.
- Military personnel.
- Police officers and firefighters.
- Musicians.

Hearing Loss Prevention Tips

1. Avoid Excessive Noise
   How loud is too loud? If you have to shout over surrounding noise, it's loud enough to damage your hearing. For example, the sounds from motorcycles, music players, and power tools like saws and drills are all loud enough to hurt your hearing over time.

2. Be a Quiet Enforcer
   Turn down the ambient noise level in your life by buying appliances and devices that have low noise ratings. If ambient noise is too loud in a health club, movie theater, restaurant, or any other place you go often, ask the manager to turn it down.

3. Limit Exposure to Loud Sounds
   Sometimes you can't avoid loud sounds. At those times, it's best to limit the amount of time you're exposed to them. Noise-induced hearing loss is a result of the loudness of sounds in addition to the duration of exposure.

4. Wear Hearing Protection
   Wear ear protection if you know you're going to be exposed to loud sounds for more than a few minutes. Choices for protection include:
   - Earplugs. Usually made of foam or rubber, earplugs are worn in your ear canal and can reduce noise by 15 to 30 decibels. You can buy earplugs off-the-shelf or have them custom-made to fit you. Some earplugs are designed to reduce noise levels evenly across all frequencies. These are useful for people who need to make sound quieter but undistorted, such as musicians.
   - Earmuffs. Designed to fit completely over your ears, earmuffs also reduce sounds by about 15 to 30 decibels. Remember that your earmuffs must fit tightly over both ears in order to block sound.
   - Earplugs and earmuffs can also be used together for even greater protection from loud sounds.

5. Don't Smoke
   Exposure to tobacco smoke has been linked to increased risk of hearing loss. Research has shown that smoking, age, and noise exposure can collectively increase a person's risk for hearing loss. If you smoke, preserving your hearing is one more good reason to quit. If you don't smoke, avoid breathing secondhand smoke.

6. Remove Earwax Properly
   Waxy buildup in your ears can muffle sound. But don't use a cotton swab to clean them out. Cotton swabs can push wax even deeper into your ear canal. Instead, use an at-home irrigation kit to soften wax and gently wash it out of your ear. If wax has become compacted in your ear, your doctor may need to remove it.

7. Check Medications for Hearing Risks
   Some 200 medications are potentially ototoxic, or damaging to hearing. These include some antibiotics and certain cancer-fighting drugs, among others. Even high doses of aspirin can harm your ears. If you take a prescription medication, check with your doctor to make sure it doesn't pose a threat to your hearing. If you must take a medication that may be ototoxic, make sure your doctor monitors your hearing and balance before and during your treatment.

8. Have Your Hearing Tested
   Make an appointment to get your hearing tested if you:
   - Have close relatives with hearing loss.
   - Have trouble hearing conversations.
   - Are exposed to loud noises on a regular basis.
   - Experience a frequent ringing sound in your ears.

If you have some hearing loss, you can prevent further damage by avoiding exposure to loud noises. If your hearing loss is severe enough, you may benefit from a hearing aid or other treatment. Be sure to see your doctor if you experience sudden unexplained changes in your hearing. Sudden hearing loss can be a symptom of other serious medical problems.