

Hints and Tips on noise exposure

The way to see if a sound is too loud is if you struggle to hear people talk when they are two metres away due to background noise then the noise levels could potentially be harmful.

According to Action On Hearing Loss 'Noise levels are usually measured in dB(A), a decibel scale that reflects the sensitivity of human ears to different levels and pitches of sound. Here are some example:

- > 20 dB (A) - a quiet room at night
- > 40 dB (A) - a quiet sitting room
- > 60 dB (A) - ordinary spoken conversation
- > 80 dB (A) - shouting
- > 110 dB (A) - a pneumatic drill nearby
- > 130 dB (A) - an aeroplane taking off 100m away
- > 140 dB (A) - the level at which noise causes pain for most people, although some people may find lower levels painful too

Long exposure to sounds over 80 dB (A) can damage your ears'

Noise exposure at work

Laws such as the Control of Noise at Work Regulations (2005) have been put in place to protect your hearing in a working environment. The regulations say that if you are exposed to loud noise at work, your employer must have noise levels assessed, and keep a record of the assessment. You will need an assessment if you need to shout when someone is 2 metres away from you. If you work requires you to use headphones or earpieces you may also require an assessment.

If the daily noise levels reaches 85dB (A), the law says you must wear ear protectors. If they fail to provide you with these they are breaking the law and could be taken to court. It is also their duty to ensure the ear protectors they provide are in a good condition and will still be effective.

Noise exposure outside of work

The louder the noise is, and the longer you are exposed to it, the higher the risk to your hearing. This can occur at any time, whether it's walking past road works, an alarm going off etc. Obviously it is difficult to plan for these unexpected events, however, it may be beneficial for you to keep earplugs or earmuffs on you for when these situations occur for a long period of time.

To make sure earplugs give you enough protection against noise, choose ones with an SNR figure of at least 20dB. Make sure that the earplugs are designed for hearing protection.

Many earplugs sold by pharmacies

and sports shops are designed for swimming or to reduce irritating background noise, and do not protect effectively against damaging levels of noise.

For light domestic use ear protectors you can normally purchase them from most sport shops or pharmacies. If you require protection from more damaging levels of noise you will need industrial-use earplugs and earmuffs, which can be purchase from many DIY stores.

[This information has been provided by Action on Hearing Loss. For more information please visit their website at: www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk. Alternatively you can phone them via telephone on 0808 808 0123 (freephone) or by textphone 0808 808 9000 (freephone).]