

# EAR PROTECTION: REDUCING HEARING LOSS

Do you strain to hear normal conversation? Does background noise at a social gathering, from a motor vehicle or from machinery interfere with your ability to hear more than it does for others? Do you find yourself turning up the volume of the television or radio so loud that others complain?

## What causes hearing loss?

We all experience a decrease in hearing with aging, which usually becomes apparent after age 50. Ear infections, seen most often in small children, can lead to hearing loss. A head injury may also damage hearing. Temporary decreased hearing may be caused by ear wax. Noise that is loud enough to prevent a conversation can also damage hearing permanently, such as from:

- Machinery
- Lawnmowers and chain saws
- Gun shots or blasts
- Loud music

## How can noise-induced hearing loss be prevented?

- Wear hearing protection, such as earplugs or earmuffs. Don't go in high-noise areas without them.
- Use hearing protection on and off the job.



## Selecting hearing protection

A wad of cotton won't protect your ears from a day of exposure to hazardous noise levels. In fact, putting cotton in ears to soften loud noises provides very little protection and a dangerous false sense of security.

Here are tips on how to select the right kind of hearing protection for the task at hand:

**Select the right style.** The two most common types of protection are earmuffs worn over the ears and plugs worn in the ears. Earmuffs may be more comfortable for longer periods of time but are not as effective when obstructed by eyeglasses or hats. Earplugs are less noticeable than muffs and their small size makes them convenient to put in a pocket. (And be sure to insert earplugs correctly to maximize effectiveness.)

**Check the noise reduction rating, or NRR.** All hearing protection devices are rated according to how much noise they reduce. For general use, look for an NRR of 25 or greater. Actual noise reduction will probably be about half of the manufacturer's NRR because ratings are obtained under perfect lab conditions.

**Remember:** Hearing loss is NOT reversible.

# KNOW YOUR DECIBELS: COMMON NOISE DB LEVELS

<p><b>PAINFUL &amp; DANGEROUS</b> - USE HEARING PROTECTION OR AVOID</p>	<p><b>140</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fireworks</li> <li>• Gunshots</li> <li>• Custom car stereos (at full volume)</li> </ul>
<p><b>UNCOMFORTABLE</b> - DANGEROUS WHEN LONGER THAN 30 SECONDS</p>	<p><b>130</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jackhammers</li> <li>• Ambulances</li> </ul> <p><b>120</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jet planes (during take off)</li> </ul>
<p><b>VERY LOUD</b> - DANGEROUS WHEN LONGER THAN 30 MINUTES</p>	<p><b>110</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerts (any genre of music)</li> <li>• Car horns</li> <li>• Sporting events</li> <li>• Chain saws</li> </ul> <p><b>100</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snowmobiles</li> <li>• Cellphones / MP3 players (at full volume)</li> </ul> <p><b>90</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lawnmowers</li> <li>• Power tools</li> <li>• Blenders</li> <li>• Hair dryers</li> </ul>

**\*\* Over 85 dB for extended periods can cause permanent hearing loss. \*\***

<p><b>LOUD</b></p>	<p><b>80</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alarm clocks</li> </ul> <p><b>70</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic</li> <li>• Vacuums</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODERATE</b></p>	<p><b>60</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal conversation</li> <li>• Dishwashers</li> </ul> <p><b>50</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate rainfall</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOFT</b></p>	<p><b>40</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet library</li> </ul> <p><b>30</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whisper</li> </ul>
<p><b>FAINT</b></p>	<p><b>20</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaves rustling</li> </ul>