

# Social Noise Guidance

## Social Noise

Good hearing is one of those things most of us take for granted. Like many aspects of good health, it is often only if it becomes impaired we appreciate how valuable it is. Noise at work (and elsewhere) can damage hearing - but it doesn't have to.

In the past, people were unaware of potential risks to hearing by over-exposure to noise. Because of this, many have gone on to suffer irreversible hearing loss. This can severely affect quality of life, or cause tinnitus (ringing or other sounds 'inside' the head), which at its worst can be excruciating.

The potential risk of harm is now well-known, but there are steps that can be taken to reduce the risk. Indeed, employees and employers are legally obliged to protect themselves.

### What can I do?

- if you have been told that protection is required where you work, use it consistently
- if you think that noise is an issue where you work (e.g. it is difficult to have a normal conversation, or there are sudden bursts of very loud noise) and protection is not already available, talk to your manager or supervisor about it
- if you have protective equipment but find it impractical or uncomfortable, or not available where and when you need it, discuss this too – there may well be alternatives or adjustments possible

One of the important things to consider about noise-induced hearing loss is that it doesn't effect your whole range of hearing - only the most important part, the frequencies you need to hear the human voice. And it doesn't affect the hearing loss we all experience with age - it adds to it.

Of course, it is not just at work that we are exposed to noise. Many people have leisure activities which, if in the workplace, would legally require protective equipment. Power tools; hobbies using anything with an engine; playing music - all are potentially harmful. Fortunately, protection such as plugs or muffs is now easily available from DIY stores, pharmacies, and elsewhere, and should come with information on the level of protection provided.

Increasing numbers of people also use portable music players, often to 'block out' street noise or other sounds. However, in order to be heard over background noise, the volume has to be turned up quite high. If you use one of these in the street, or on the bus or train, try noting the level you listen at, and listen again in a quiet room. You may be surprised at how loud it is.

It's perhaps human nature not to worry about things that will only effect us in the future. If harm seems far off, we can't really imagine the consequences. However, if you have a computer (and speakers or headphones) you can get a good idea of what noise-induced hearing loss is like by going to the following link and listening to what is (and isn't..!) there

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/demonstration.htm>

## **Audiometry testing**

Periodic audiometric testing assists in determining the effectiveness of the controls adopted by the University as part of the hearing conservation programme.

Your Manager/Supervisor should assess your risk to noise (if any exist) and refer you to Occupational Health for testing. The OHU will contact you with a date and time for your test in due course.