

Car Stereos & Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL)

What sounds cause Noise Induced Hearing Loss?

NIHL can be caused by a one-time exposure to an intense “impulse” sound, such as an explosion, or by continuous exposure to loud sounds over an extended period of time, such as the noise generated by pimped up car stereo systems.

Sound is measured in units called decibels. On the decibel scale, an increase of 10 means that a sound is 10 times more intense, or powerful. To your ears, it sounds twice as loud. The humming of a refrigerator is 45 decibels, normal conversation is approximately 60 decibels, and the noise from heavy city traffic can reach 85 decibels. Noise that can cause NIHL are typically sources emitting sounds from 120 to 150 decibels. Long or repeated exposure to sounds at or above 85 decibels can cause hearing loss. The louder the sound, the shorter the time period before NIHL can occur.

Your car stereo was measured at:dB(A) SPL

Sounds of less than 75 decibels, even after long exposure, are unlikely to cause hearing loss.

Although being aware of decibel levels is an important factor in protecting your hearing, distance from the source of the sound and duration of exposure to the sound are equally important.

A good rule of thumb is to avoid noises that are “too loud” and “too close” or that last “too long.”

What are the effects of NIHL?

Exposure to harmful sounds causes damage to the hair cells as well as the auditory, or hearing, nerve. Impulse sound can result in immediate hearing loss that may be permanent. This kind of hearing loss may be accompanied by tinnitus—a ringing, buzzing, or roaring in the ears or head.

Continuous exposure to loud noise also can damage the structure of hair cells, resulting in hearing loss and tinnitus, although the process occurs more gradually than for impulse noise, and you may not realise until it is too late.

Exposure to impulse and continuous noise may cause only a temporary hearing loss. If a person regains hearing, the temporary hearing loss is called a temporary threshold shift. The temporary threshold shift largely disappears 16 to 48 hours after exposure to loud noise.

What are the symptoms of NIHL?

When a person is exposed to loud noise over a long period of time, symptoms of NIHL will increase gradually. Over time, the sounds a person hears may become distorted or muffled, and it may be difficult for the person to understand speech. Someone with NIHL may not even be aware of the loss, but it can be detected with a hearing test.



Nuisance from Car Stereos

In addition to damaging your own hearing, car stereos also cause annoyance to the public at large. Loud car stereos, especially with heavy bass, can be heard significant distances from the vehicle. When cars are stopped at traffic lights or gathered together at night playing music, this will often disturb peoples sleep, and gives rise to complaints to the Police and Local Authority.

Please consider neighbours

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