

Are you protecting your hearing at work?

# Listen up! How to prevent hearing loss

By Jesse Marchand

Noise-induced hearing loss is a hazard that workers of all ages need to take seriously. Once your hearing is gone, it's gone forever. These tips can help.

You know how your ears ring or feel plugged after leaving a loud environment, like a concert or a club? While your ears usually feel back to normal the next day, your hearing may have already been damaged. Face that over and over and you'll have permanent hearing loss. That's why it's so important to protect your hearing if you work in a noisy environment.

### How does noise affect your hearing?

Although noise-induced hearing loss usually happens gradually, the damage is irreversible — even if you're young. "Noise isn't just a problem for those working on construction sites or around heavy machinery," says Sasha Brown, WorkSafeBC audiologist. "Even environments such as loud restaurants, bars, and recreation centres can damage your hearing. If you

have to raise your voice to be heard by someone an arm's length (one metre) away, the noise level is likely hazardous." Working in a kitchen and can't hear your co-worker next to you over the sound of the blender? That's hazardous noise you're being exposed to.

"Hearing loss can happen when you're exposed to noise louder than 85 decibels. It's painless, so you may not realize something is wrong until it's too late. And noise-induced hearing loss cannot be fixed," notes Brown.

"Remember that it's your employer's responsibility to reduce workplace noise. If the noise can't be reduced to safe levels, you'll need to wear hearing protection," adds Brown.

### How can hearing protection help?

While it's counterintuitive, you can actually hear people better when you're wearing hearing protection because your ears aren't overloaded with noise that drowns out their voices.

When it comes to hearing protection, Brown says to keep the following things in mind:

- 1 Make sure your employer provides you with hearing protection and that you wear it when required.
- 2 Be sure you're protected for the entire time you're exposed to noise. This means wearing hearing protection before you enter a noisy area and only removing it once you're away from the noise.
- 3 If earplugs are your hearing protection, make sure they fit properly and are inserted correctly. Here's a good rule of thumb: Someone facing you shouldn't be able to see the compressible foam earplugs you're wearing if they're in properly. And remember that one size doesn't fit all.
- 4 Earbuds and headphones are not work equipment and don't provide hearing protection. Listening to music, podcasts, or anything else on a portable device while working can distract you from other important sounds, such as approaching machinery, alarms, or warnings from other workers.

### What type of hearing protection do you need?

Hearing protection comes in many styles, shapes, and sizes. Your employer is responsible for providing you with options that fit properly, feel comfortable, and are suitable for the environment you're working in. You're responsible for wearing the hearing protection whenever it's required.

If you haven't received hearing protection yet and you think you need it, or you don't know how to wear the protection you've been given, be sure to speak up and ask your supervisor or employer.

### For more information

The WorkSafeBC resource "[Listen up: How to prevent hearing loss](#)" contains more information, including a chart with decibel ratings for common sounds.

Visit [worksafebc.com/hearing-loss-prevention](https://worksafebc.com/hearing-loss-prevention) for videos and other resources on the topic. 🗣️

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