



HOW LOUD IS LOUD?

Most of us take our sense of hearing for granted – we assume that we hear what everyone else hears. Loss of hearing may not be realized until a friend or spouse screams in frustration- “Why don’t you ever listen to me!”. This is because hearing loss is usually gradual. Normally it doesn’t hurt, so we don’t know it is happening.

It doesn’t annoy us like losing our eyesight. In fact, it is sometimes a blessing to tune out all the clatter and noise of the city and workplace.

Yet our ability to hear when we want to is precious and must be protected. Employers often reduce the amount of noise in the workplace by enclosing or muffling loud machinery, but they usually can’t eliminate it entirely. Employers may also rotate workers out of an area, so they don’t experience a full workday of excessive noise exposure.

Whatever the length of time you work in the area with high noise levels, you are probably required to wear a type of hearing protection. Some people consider this a nuisance. The more you know about those ears of yours, however, the more likely you will take responsibility for protecting them.

Many disposable or reusable plugs are available and most of these reduce noise by about 20-30 decibels. The noise reduction rating (NRR) is usually marked on the package or on the box if they come in bulk. However, since the NRR is established in a laboratory with perfectly fitted plugs, experts recommend that the true rating is generally about 7 decibels less than indicated. Hearing detectors of the earmuff type are usually closer to the actual NRR.

Some degree of hearing loss is part of the normal aging process, but young people should always be warned about the dangers of a rock concert, boom box, lawn mower or loud car engine. Of course, they may not listen to you – but if they have permanent hearing loss, they won’t be able to listen to anyone, will they?