Music; When it Affects the Sounds of Your Life

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As you are walking to class, your favorite song on your portable music player comes on. You instinctively grope for the volume button to make sure it is loud enough to play and push those insert earphones in your ears as far as they will go. What can it hurt; it is your favorite song after all.

Audicologist experts agree that hearing loss is increasing in the United States (ASHA, 2006). The number of Americans between the ages of 3 years and older have some sort of hearing disorder. This has doubled since 1971. Of those figures one-third is said to be a noise-induced hearing loss (Mott, 2006).

This staggering epidemic is due in part to advances in technology. The increased production and use of portable listening devices, increased volume ability and insert earphones contribute considerably to this dilemma.

Insert earphones do not block out unwanted sound, therefore listeners increase the volume in order to better hear the desired sound. Decibel levels, or volume, of these devices exceed levels of 118 dB to 120dB, which is the equivalent to listening to a chainsaw directly in the ear. Not only is loudness contributing to the problem, length of time per-day at this level is also a factor.

Hearing impairment occurs when continuous loud sounds destroy the tiny hair cells in the inner ear. Only 25 to 30 percent of these hair cells need to be damaged to experience a permanent hearing loss.

While noise induced hearing loss is irreversible, it is also avoidable, explains Pam Mason, ASHA’s Director of Audiology. Once hearing is gone, there is no way to restore the damage.

Music is intended be enjoyed, however, all music listeners need to be aware of the potential loss of hearing. Once an issue with hearing is noticed, permanent damage is already done.

A good measure for how loud is too loud: If you are standing about three feet away from someone that is listening to headphones, and you can hear their music, that person is giving themselves a hearing loss (Mason, 2006).