

A Message to Employees on Avoiding Hearing Loss



GOOD HEARING IS IMPORTANT

Value your hearing: it's precious.
A decrease in your ability to hear will:

Make it difficult to talk to other people,

- Make it difficult to make friends and share information at work,
- Make it difficult to learn about new things,
- Make it less likely that you will hear warning signals,
- Prevent enjoyment of music and the sounds of nature.

NOISE CAN CAUSE LOSS OF HEARING

Many New Zealanders have permanently damaged hearing from the effects of excessive noise. There is no medical treatment for noise-induced hearing loss. Damaged hearing can't be repaired but it *can* be prevented.

Exposure to too much noise is a leading cause of hearing loss. Most of this exposure takes place in the workplace. Recreation and leisure activities such as shooting will also cause hearing loss.

Many appliances and tools we use in the home produce high noise levels. Mowers, chainsaws, portable hand saws, and vacuum cleaners are just a few of the modern appliances that can be noisy.

If you are exposed to loud noise, you may notice a ringing in your ears or some deafness. A quiet period of 12-16 hours will assist in the recovery of your hearing. Staying in a noisy place will delay this recovery and the hearing loss could become permanent.

PREVENTION OF HEARING LOSS

The Health and Safety in Employment Act requires hazards such as workplace noise to be controlled or reduced to a safe level. All people should make it their

business to ensure that noise does not damage hearing. If possible, do not enter into a noisy place of work. If you have to enter, wear hearing protection.

As part of its prevention activities, the Occupational Safety and Health Service of the Department of Labour (OSH) wants to know if you have developed hearing loss as a result of your work. The workplace can be visited and action taken to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Act.

HEARING LOSS AFFECTS MANY ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE

The main effects of hearing loss relate to your ability to hear speech:

- Everyone seems to be mumbling.
- Small children may be more difficult to understand.
- Relaxed conversation becomes hard work because you will have to concentrate.
- Using a telephone is difficult.
- Social occasions will no longer be so enjoyable.
- It will be difficult dealing with people in noisy places, such as shops.

Other effects include:

- You will not be able to hear conversations at parties or other occasions where numbers of people are present.
- Hearing loss will reduce the pleasure of music, television, films and the sounds of nature.
- Hearing loss is often accompanied by ringing in the ears. This is very distressing and can cause loss of sleep and unnecessary stress.
- Hearing loss will reduce your ability to hear warning sounds such as bells, whistles, or a cry for help.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF NOISE IS AFFECTING MY HEARING?

Unfortunately the effects of noise-induced hearing loss develop slowly and painlessly.

The loss won't be apparent until quite a lot of hearing has gone.

It's not like other physical damage because there's no pain to warn you.

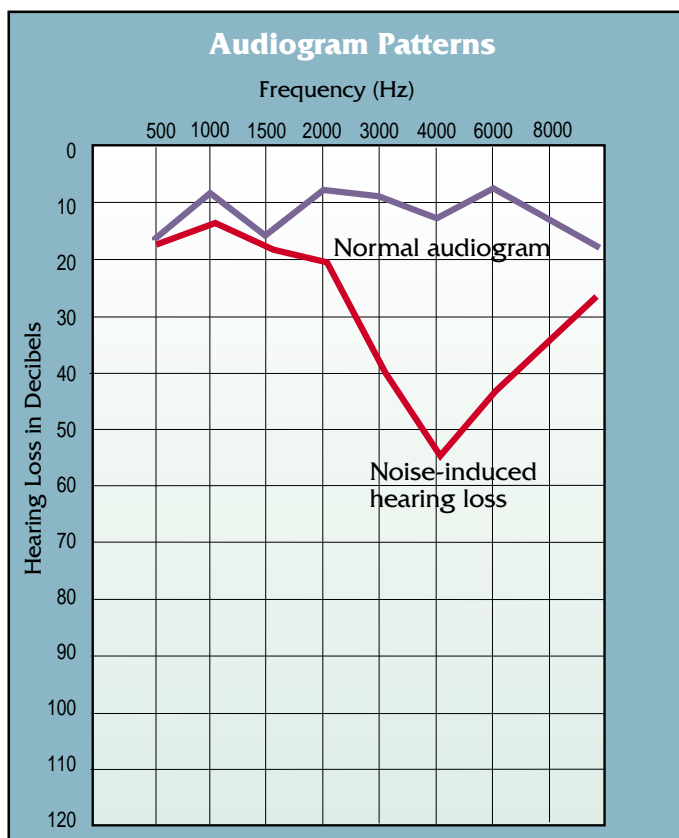
The loss will become more apparent the older you get.

HOW IS HEARING MEASURED?

A test called audiometry is used to measure hearing ability. Sounds of different types are played through earphones for you to listen to.

In this way it is possible to draw a graph of your hearing profile, similar to the one shown below. This will confirm whether or not you have noise-induced hearing loss.

The graph shows the ranges of sounds used for measuring hearing. Initially, hearing loss usually occurs at 4000 Hz. As a result, the first sounds lost are "Sh". This may not significantly affect your ability to understand speech. But as hearing loss progresses, consonants such as "T", "P", "K" are lost, which will affect your ability to understand what's being said.



For this reason, it's important that as soon as you notice or suspect some hearing loss, you act to prevent further loss.

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN MY HEARING IS DAMAGED?

- Ensure you don't lose any more hearing ability by always avoiding exposure to noise. If you can't avoid exposure, always wear suitable hearing protection.
- Accept that it's a permanent condition and be prepared to adjust your lifestyle.
- Investigate the possibility of having a hearing aid fitted. Your doctor should refer you to a specialist.
- As you get older, you may find that lip reading is beneficial. Join a class at your local branch of the Hearing Association.
- Investigate the availability of special telephones and devices to help you listen to TV.

Families have an important part to play.

- Get them involved in the assessment process so that they understand your problems.
- They should learn to speak slowly and clearly.
- They should not try to talk to you from behind or from another room.

REMEMBER

- Noise control programmes can stop the progression of most hearing loss.
- Do what you can to reduce noise.
- If your hearing loss occurred through work, enquire from ACC about special assistance they may provide with the cost of hearing aids or medical treatment.
- For statistical purposes, your case may be entered on the OSH Notification of Occupational Diseases (NODS) register.

If you need further advice about noise and its effect on hearing, contact your local OSH office.