

# “I am concerned my hearing is getting worse. How can I prevent further loss?”

**Once hearing is damaged, it often cannot be restored.**

Everyday sounds typically do not damage your hearing. However, many people participate in activities that produce harmful sound levels, such as attending loud sporting events or music concerts and using power tools. Read below for information about causes of hearing loss, symptoms and how to protect your hearing.

## Common causes of hearing loss

- **Noise**  
Loud sounds can damage the structures of the inner ear.
- **Age**  
Changes in the inner ear happen as you get older. This causes a slow but steady hearing loss.
- **Medications and chemicals**  
Certain chemicals and medications can damage your hearing. Talk to your primary care provider (PCP) or pharmacist if you have concerns about any medications you are taking.
- **Injury**  
Damage to the ear drum, brain injuries or large changes in air pressure can cause loss of hearing.
- **Viruses and infections**  
Some infections and diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella and meningitis can cause loss of hearing.
- **Occupational hearing loss**  
Hearing loss is one of the most common work-related illnesses in the United States. About one in four U.S. workers have hearing loss caused by occupational exposures. Everyday equipment, such as lawnmowers, power tools and personal stereos, may be loud enough to damage your ears. Consult with your occupational health and safety officer at work if you are concerned about noise levels in your workplace.

## Common symptoms of hearing loss

- Muffled hearing and a feeling that your ear is plugged
- Trouble understanding what people are saying, especially when other people are talking around you or when there is background noise, such as a radio
- A ringing, roaring, hissing or buzzing in the ear
- Ear pain, itching, or irritation of the ear or fluid leaking from the ear
- A feeling that you or your surroundings are spinning

## When to contact a medical professional

Contact your PCP if you have sudden, severe hearing loss, ringing in the ears or ear pain. Let your PCP know if your hearing problems interfere with your lifestyle, do not go away or become worse. Hearing loss can develop gradually. Ask your PCP about hearing screenings.

If your PCP thinks that you have hearing loss, he or she will do hearing tests to find out how severe it is. He or she can help you decide on the best treatment.

## Protect your hearing

### Pay attention to the volume:

- Turn the volume down on listening devices and TVs.
- Limit the length of time exposed to loud sounds by walking away or taking breaks.
- If possible, avoid loud, noisy activities and places. If it's not possible, use hearing protection.
- Keep earplugs in your car, pockets or other easy-to-access places.

**Keep ears clean and dry:** Keep your ears dry. If you feel water in the ear, tilt your head to the side and tug lightly on the ear lobe to try and coax the water out. Don't try to clean your ears by inserting anything into the ear canals. You may injure the delicate skin, or impact earwax.

**Follow your PCP's recommendations:** Make sure you receive all the recommended immunizations to protect against diseases that can cause hearing loss. Take medications as prescribed by your PCP.

**Check and measure the sound level around you:** There are free sound level meters developed as apps for smartphones.

