Ways to Slow Down Further Hearing Loss

When we recognize we have hearing loss, we become acutely aware of how important our hearing is to our everyday lives and happiness. Hearing aids are a fantastic way to gain back lost sounds and take part in a full range of social activities. In fact, multiple studies have shown that people who address their hearing loss live happier, healthier lives as a result.

You already know the benefit that hearing aids can have in your life, so preserving the hearing you have—and preventing further hearing loss—is a top priority. If you want to make sure you preserve your hearing for years to come, here are a few steps you can take.

1) MINIMIZE EXPOSURE TO LOUD NOISE

The vast majority of people with hearing loss in the US did not lose their hearing due to a single loud noise incident. Most of them simply have age-related hearing loss or presbycusis, which is the gradual loss of hearing over many years. Presbycusis is mostly due to exposure to everyday sounds over a lifetime of hearing.

To prevent further loss, it is imperative to minimize your exposure to further noises that can damage your hearing. It’s recommended that we don’t expose ourselves to noises that are louder than 85db for extended periods of time. Sporting events, lawn mowers, shooting ranges, and even regular exposure to hair dryers can contribute to hearing loss. For example, here are a few more sounds that you may encounter in everyday life that could damage your hearing:

- Motorcycle: 95db
- Woodshop: 100db
- Ambulance siren: 120db
- Firecrackers: 130db
- Jet engine: 140db

Avoiding these sounds is a great way to prevent further hearing loss. However, sometimes you have to be around loud sounds—that’s when you need protection.

2) PROTECT YOUR HEARING

Your hearing aids are great at amplifying and optimizing sounds so you can hear better. But sometimes the sounds around us are too loud, and we need to protect our hearing from them. Here are a few ways you can protect your ears from loud sounds to preserve your hearing.

**Standard ear plugs**

The most basic form of ear protection are standard ear plugs. On the low end, cheap ear plugs can be made of foam and will only cost you a few cents at a sporting goods store. However, they aren’t meant to last for more than a few uses. Longer-lasting, more-expensive ear plugs are made of rubber or plastic and are meant to be reused. Depending on the quality and material they’re made of, these ear plugs may cost anywhere from a couple dollars to twenty dollars a pair.
Custom ear plugs

Many people who need to protect their hearing on a regular basis choose to get custom ear plugs. The advantage of custom ear plugs is that they are molded to your ears and are built to last longer and be more durable than over-the-counter ear plugs.

To get custom earplugs, you'll need to go to an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist and have a mold made of your ear. Then the molds are shipped to a company that will create the earplugs based on your mold.

While the cost of custom earplugs can run into the hundreds of dollars, they can be a worthwhile investment if you need regular protection and want something that will last.

Ear muffes

When we say ear muffs we’re not talking about the fluffy kind that keep your ears warm in winter. Sound-blocking ear muffs look like a pair of big, over-the-ear headphones—two plastic shells joined by a headband. The inside of the shells are filled with foam and other sound dampening material to block out the loudest sounds. You can buy them at sporting goods stores, hardware stores, hunting supply stores, or firearm dealers. There are many different varieties and noise protection levels, so ear muffs can cost anywhere from ten dollars to hundreds of dollars for top-of-the-line models.

3) KNOW YOUR SOUND ENVIRONMENT

Although audiologists recommend that you avoid sounds above 85db for extended periods of time, most people can’t tell how loud sound is just by listening to it. For example, moderate city traffic is usually in the 85db range, but an everyday sound like traffic may not be a sound you consider dangerous. To know more about the sounds around you everyday, you can use a sound meter to determine safe and dangerous sound levels.

Today, because of smartphones, you can carry a sound meter in your pocket for free. The Decibel Meter app for iPhone and the Sound Meter app for Android are both free apps you can download to measure the volume level of the sounds around you every day. For a few more dollars there are other apps that may add a bit more functionality. Search your smartphone app store for “sound meter” to explore more apps.

If you are aware of the volume of your sound environment, you’ll know when you need to avoid certain places or use hearing protection.

YOUR HEARING IS IMPORTANT

Because you already realize how important your hearing is to your quality of life, it’s time for you to protect it. Follow the tips above to protect the hearing you have, and you’ll continue to hear the sounds of everyday life for years to come.