Preventing Hearing Loss Among Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents can develop hearing loss by listening to loud noises or music. The hearing loss can happen with extremely loud noise over a short time frame, such as when a teen goes to a music concert for a night or goes on a hunting trip and listens to gunfire for a day. Hearing loss can also happen with loud noises over a longer time, such as when teens listen to loud music in their headphones over weeks or months.

In a health survey done in 2005-2006, researchers found that about 16% of US adolescents had hearing loss. This was a greater percentage compared with past surveys done between 1988 and 1994 that found that about 12% of adolescents had hearing loss. The increase in hearing loss may be partly due to the popularity of headphones used by adolescents. These headphones include traditional headphones as well as “earbuds.”

A research study in this month’s Archives studied 11th-grade adolescents who had a hearing screen in their school. The study found that students who listened to MP3 players and headphones were more likely to have hearing loss. The study also found that students who had problems on the hearing test said they were willing to turn down the volume on their MP3 players or limit their time listening to them. This research study shows us that when adolescents learned that they had hearing loss, they said they were willing to change their headphone use to prevent further hearing loss.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO PREVENT HEARING LOSS?

- Talk with your adolescents about using lower volume when listening to music on headphones or earbuds. The highest volume setting on headphones is too loud and can lead to hearing loss.
- Talk with your child about wearing foam ear plugs when he or she goes to loud concerts.
- Talk with your child about using earmuffs if he or she does any loud recreational activities, such as riding on a snowmobile or hunting.
- Talk with your school or pediatrician about screening for both high- and low-frequency hearing loss; many schools do not use a hearing screen that can test for high-frequency hearing loss related to noise.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Listen to Your Buds, a public education campaign to prevent noise-induced hearing loss by helping parents teach their children how to use personal audio technology safely.
http://www.listentoyourbuds.org/

Wise Ears campaign, a public education campaign to reduce noise-induced hearing loss.
http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/wise/

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INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine Web site at http://www.archpediatrics.com.

Sources: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders