

You Just Might Have Hearing Loss - Safety Talk Handout

Too much noise can cause a permanent hearing loss. This condition develops gradually and without pain but is permanent.

Noise-induced hearing loss cannot be reversed, but it can be halted if you protect your ears from further exposure. If your hearing is starting to fade, do something about it now so it does not get worse. And if your hearing hasn't been damaged, keep it that way.

Two types of noise damage the hearing. One is a sudden loud noise like an explosion or a gunshot. Permanent hearing loss can happen instantly.

More common, however, is an accumulation of damage from noise. Conveyors, air tools and heavy equipment are among the countless sources of workplace noise.

If the noise problem can't be corrected by measures such as sound insulation and machinery maintenance, then you have to wear hearing protection. The type will depend on your work situation. You may need to wear disposable foam earplugs or molded plastic canal caps. Earmuffs may be required in addition.

Regular hearing tests are usually provided for persons who work in noisy environments. A baseline test is done first, and subsequent tests will show if hearing has deteriorated from that point.

Here is a quiz to help you determine if your hearing is in jeopardy. This is no substitute for a real hearing test, but these questions may alert you to a problem:

- Does it seem like everyone else mumbles? Do you often have to ask people to repeat what they have said?
- Do you often misunderstand what others say?
- Do you have trouble picking out sounds from a noisy background? Is it hard to follow what one person is saying in a room where everyone is talking?
- Is it harder for you to hear things when you first leave work, with your hearing returning to normal a few hours later?
- Do others complain that you play the television or talk too loudly?
- Is it difficult for you to hear on the telephone?

- Do you have trouble hearing certain tones, such as high notes in music or a high-pitched voice?

- Do you get confused about where a sound is coming from?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, you might be developing a hearing loss. Learn how to protect yourself from further hearing damage.

Hearing protection will only work if you use it. The inconvenience of wearing earplugs or earmuffs is slight compared to the inconvenience of being unable to hear for the rest of your life.