



How loud is too loud?

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“How loud is too loud?” Some sounds are obviously too loud. We know this right away because these sounds hurt; we cover our ears and want to pull away. Other loud events, like music, are more difficult to judge. For example, a mother might say some of her son’s music is too loud, mostly because she doesn’t like it. But, if she is listening to music she likes, then loud might be just right!

Any kind of music can be too loud, whether it is classical, rock ‘n’ roll or punk. In fact, there are specific earplugs that were designed originally for the Chicago Symphony for just this reason. If you are lucky and talented enough to be a professional musician, you may happen to spend hours of practice

sitting in front of a trombone that is too loud. Most hearing protection makes everything sound funny. Musician earplugs keep the frequency response perfect, but turn everything down so musicians can practice and hear everything accurately, without damaging their hearing.

A few decades ago, people listened to Walkmans. Walkmans could get loud, but were less likely to damage a person’s hearing because the batteries would die so quickly. Now, personal music listening occurs almost constantly and music can be listened to for hours and hours at a time.

Hearing loss from noise is affected by two things: how loud the sound is and how long you listen to it. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (*OSHA*) regulates safety in the workplace. *OSHA* regulations indicate that you can listen to a sound at 90 dB for eight hours without damage, but 95 dB is allowed for only four hours. For a reference point, “normal” conversation is 60 to 65 dB. Common household appliances, such as blow dryers, kitchen blenders and food processors, can range from 80 to 90 dB, while lawn mowers are commonly about 106 dB.

To shield themselves from harmfully loud external sounds, many people can benefit from wearing inexpensive earplugs or earmuffs that can be purchased from a local hardware store. For children, earmuffs are often better because it is easy to see if they are on correctly. Commonly used yellow cotton earplugs can be inserted incorrectly quite easily and as a result, their benefit is not received.

Custom earplugs are another available option. For those with small or differently shaped ear canals, custom molds are an excellent alternative option. Many people find these custom-made products more comfortable, since they are crafted to fit their ears exactly and can be designed to accommodate the particular situation the user requires them for (*hunting, motorcycle riding, listening to music, etc.*).



About Better Care Audiology

Consulting with your local audiologist is the best way to ensure a proper earplug fit. After looking in the ear canal, the audiologist will place a small cotton block into the canal. Next, impression material is gently placed on top of this. After the material dries (*approximately one to two minutes*), the impression is sent to a specialized lab where a manufacturer will make the desired type of ear protection. Ear plugs come in a variety of colors and designs and take two to three weeks from the time the impression is taken until they arrive back at the audiologist's office for pickup. At that time, the audiologist will review proper use and care of the earplugs and you can be on their way within 15 minutes.

Different ear protection is selected based on what the person needs it for. For example, if you are trying to wear earplugs under a motorcycle helmet, you will desire small plugs for comfort. These plugs also are comfortable for sleeping. If you want musician plugs or custom earplug monitors (*for listening to music*), that type of plug can be ordered.

Determining how loud is too loud is based on several factors, but chances are, if you are wondering about it, then the noise you are listening to is too loud and you will want to know your options for protecting your hearing.