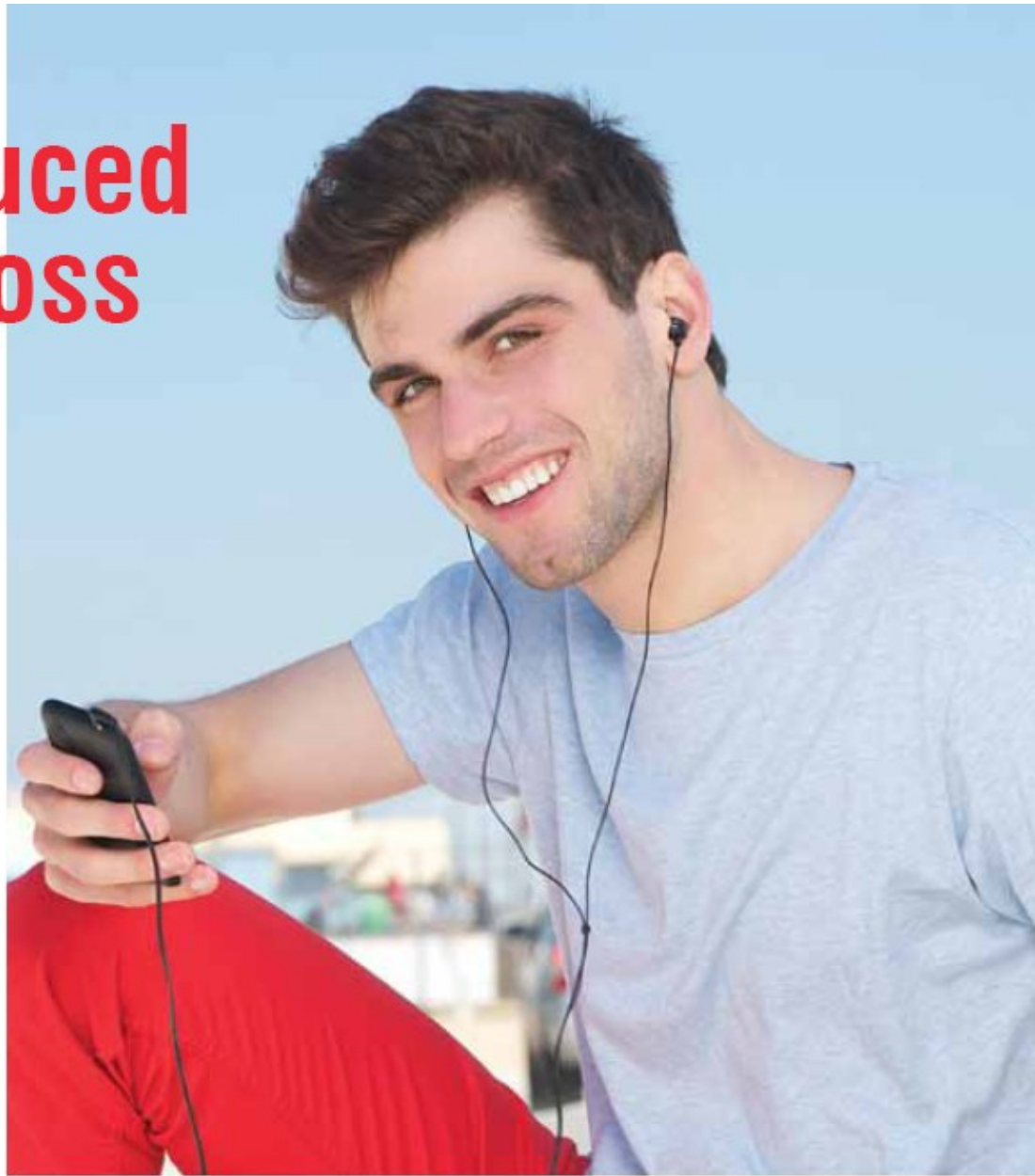


Noise Induced Hearing Loss

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Do you have to repeatedly tell your teenage son to turn down the volume of his iPod just so he can hear you? Ever listen to him complaining of feeling ringing, buzzing or hissing noises in his ears? These are the two most evident symptoms of hearing loss. Recent studies showed that today two in every five teens have hearing loss in some form or another, which is 30 per cent higher than it was in the 80s and 90s. Now most iPods and mp3 players can generate sounds that measure up to 120 decibels, equivalent to the sound produced at a rock concert. The hearing loss caused owing to the use of headphones is extremely gradual, with no clear cautionary signs; a hearing examination is the only way one can diagnose hearing damage.



Common Symptoms

- ◆ Buzzing or hissing noises in the ear
- ◆ Difficulty in understanding speech in loud places with bad acoustics
- ◆ Feeling like your ears are constantly plugged
- ◆ Having to listen to the radio or television at a much louder volume than usual

How does the ear get damaged?

The innermost area of the ear has nerve endings in the form of small hair cells. These nerve endings change the sound waves into electric waves. The nerves then carry these to the brain, which identifies the sounds. These

minute nerve endings may be damaged on exposure to sounds that are too loud.

When are you at risk?

- ◆ High volume of the music – there is risk of hearing loss in exposure to sounds 100dB and above over periods of two continuous hours or less per day, with chances of sudden instantaneous loss at exposure of 120dB and above.
- ◆ When you are sitting too close to the speakers.
- ◆ Listening to loud music frequently and using earphones.
- ◆ History of hearing loss in the family indicates a sensitivity of the ear, so it's better to be careful in such cases.

- ◆ Occupational exposure to loud sounds, as in being a sound/audio crew-member or a musician, working in nightclubs or being exposed to artillery firing etc.

Diagnosis

After examining the ears physically, your doctor will order a few tests. The basic test is pure tone audiometry, which typically shows a sensorineural hearing loss predominantly at 4 kHz, and impedance audiometry or MRI of the brain and cerebellopontine angle, if any other cause of hearing loss is suspected.

Treatment

The treatment depends on the cause. Generally, a short burst of steroids

Go Retro With Earphones

While listening to music with personal music devices like mp3 players, preferably use noise cancellation headphones. While using the ear bud type headphones, users tend to increase the volume to cut down on the surrounding noises. Headphones that go over your ears can also damage your hearing if you use them too long or play music too loudly. They are just not as much of a risk as ear insertion types are. Having the source of the sound in your ear canal can increase the sound's volume by 6 to 9 decibels – enough to cause some serious problems. If you listen to music at high volume (level five or more) for 15 minutes each day, it can damage your hearing in the long run. So keep the volume low.

are tried for sudden onset of hearing loss with nerve supplements like high doses of vitamin B6 and B12, with



gingko biloba extracts and peripheral vasodilators.

Prevention

There is no situation where the old adage 'prevention is better than cure' is more applicable.

When at a concert, the farther you sit from the speakers the better it is (at least 10 feet away). Move to quieter areas in between to give rest to your ears. In all that noise, others might shout into your ears to be heard – avoid that, as it damages your ears more. After any kind of noise exposure, give your ears at least a day's rest.

When To See The Doctor

- ◆ When some sounds seem painful or too loud
- ◆ When you have trouble differentiating between high pitched sounds
- ◆ When voices sound slurred or mumbled
- ◆ When you frequently need to turn up the volume of radio or television to hear clearly
- ◆ If you have muffling or ringing in your ears for more than 24 hours after exposure to loud music