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RECYCLE THIS PLEASE!



Turn It DOWN!

Are your headphones or earbuds damaging your hearing?

CHECK OUT THESE VIDEOS!

- Music to Your Ears
- What It Takes to Be President

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HEALTH

Turn It Down

You may not realize it, but your earbuds or headphones could be harming your hearing.

As You Read, Think About:

How can you make sure you listen to headphones or earbuds at a safe volume?

Chances are you've worn headphones more times than you can count. You might wear them when you listen to music, play games, or watch videos on YouTube. But it may be time to turn down the volume. A study released in 2022 found that more than 1 billion teens and young adults worldwide could be at risk of hearing loss. The researchers say one main reason is the use of smartphones and other devices with earbuds or headphones.

Many kids think they don't need to worry about protecting their hearing.

"One myth about hearing loss is that only older people like grandma and grandpa get it. That's not the case," says Michele DiStefano. She's an audiologist (a doctor who specializes in hearing) at the Center for Hearing and Communication in New York City.

Earbuds and headphones have become more popular over time. Meanwhile, doctors say they've seen an increase in hearing damage among younger people.

WORDS TO KNOW

exposed *verb, past tense.* left without protection from danger or harm

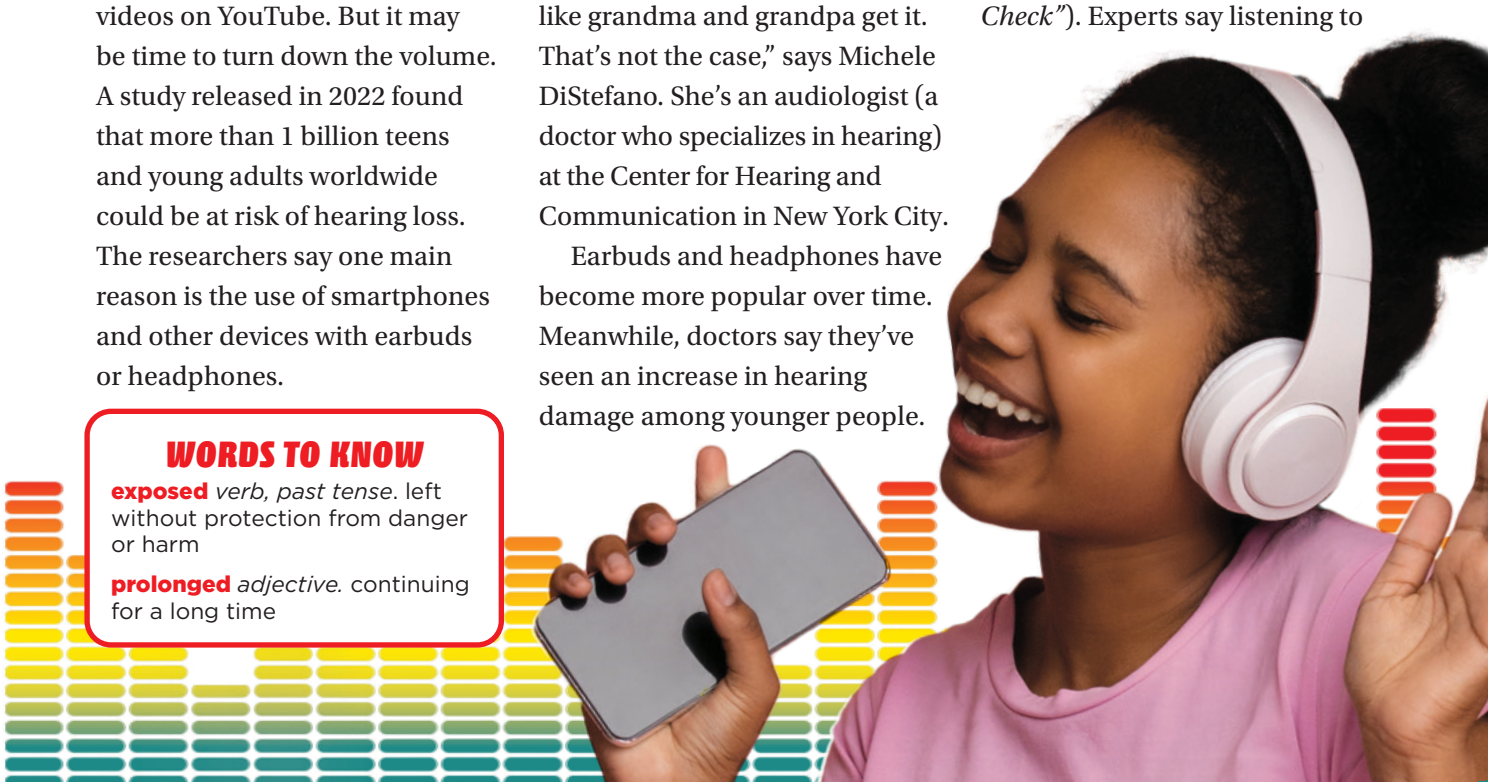
prolonged *adjective.* continuing for a long time

But there are some simple steps you can take to protect your ears and listen to devices safely.

Too Loud, Too Long

Even if you don't crank up the volume to the highest level, there's still a good chance you're playing your music or video games too loudly. DiStefano warns that the louder the sound, the less time you should be **exposed** to it.

Sound is measured in units called decibels (*see "Sound Check"*). Experts say listening to



any sound louder than 85 decibels for **prolonged** periods can cause hearing damage. The 2022 study showed that it's common for young people to listen to smartphones and other devices at 105 decibels. Listening to sounds that loud for even a few minutes a day can harm your ears.

Doctors point out that for many people, hearing loss is gradual. The damage can come on so slowly that they don't realize there's a problem until it's too late. And unfortunately, noise-related hearing loss can be permanent.

Watch a VIDEO
Find out how your hearing works.

Sound Advice

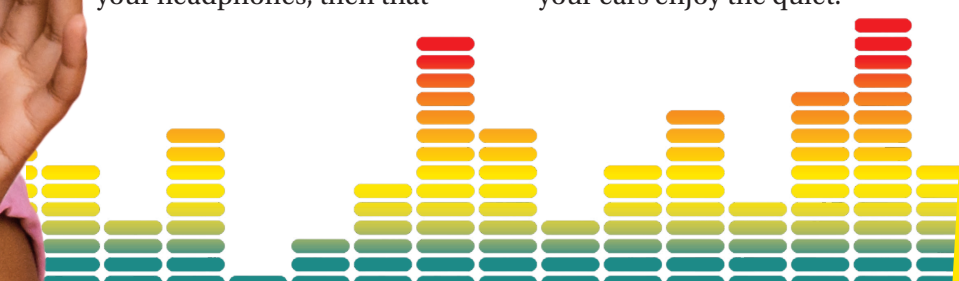
The good news is that you can often prevent hearing damage. Audiologists say a good way to avoid problems is to be smart about using headphones and earbuds. Here are some tips.

Ask a friend. "If somebody else can hear your music from your headphones, then that means it's too loud," explains DiStefano.

Check your settings. Most smartphones and tablets allow you to set your headphones to a certain level. (On an iPhone, for example, the volume can be set to not go above 75 decibels.) These devices can also send notifications to alert you if the sound is too loud for too long. A parent can help you find these settings on your device.

Find the right fit. A pair of headphones or earbuds that fits snugly will limit outside noise so you can hear your music better at lower volumes.

Take a break. Like every other part of your body, your ears need rest. That's true even if you're listening to headphones at a safe volume. DiStefano suggests using what's called the 60/60 rule. Play your device at or below 60 percent of maximum volume for no more than 60 minutes per day. Then let your ears enjoy the quiet.



Sound Check

This chart shows the decibel levels (dB) of some common sounds.



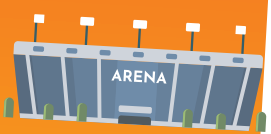
140 dB
Jet aircraft taking off, from 100 feet away



120 dB
Nearby siren



110 dB
Maximum volume on a smartphone



100 dB
Football game in a stadium

85 dB ⚠
Risk of hearing damage starts here.



80 dB
Hair dryer



60 dB
Normal conversation



30 DB
Soft whisper

Note: Decibel levels are approximate. Sources: Center for Hearing and Communication, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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