

Health and Wellness:
Personal Music Player/iPod Safety To Prevent Hearing Loss

By Laura Jimenez, M.S.W.

You are in good company if you use ear buds on a daily basis. In fact worldwide, more than 305 million people use them for their iPods. Not quite ten years old, Apple tapped a huge part of the music market by producing players that were impossible before then by delivering very high volume with excellent quality which plays on a single charge for more than 15 hours. The louder volume supplied by music players is often abused by its younger listeners and can cause hearing damage that will result in permanent hearing loss. However, this can be prevented with only two easy steps:

- 1) Reduce the volume so others around you cannot hear the music you are playing;
and
- 2) Take breaks.

As a guideline, normal conversation typically occurs at 60 decibels and a blasting audio file is about 115 decibels. Shortly after a 2006 unsuccessful lawsuit against Apple, they updated their software so that their iPods cannot play higher than 100 decibels. Although any iPod manufactured since 2007 would be preset not to blast louder than 100, it can still do damage with the remaining elevated sound intensity and/or when heard for an extended period of time. A safe rule of thumb is if the music can be enjoyed while also hearing someone three feet away speaking.

Some teens are notorious for using cranked-up iPods as an escape with their favorite rapper or band. Premature irreparable hearing damage is serious!

Dr. Fred Telischi, Chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of Miami predicts that “These are going to be issues that are going to come up as this generation of adolescents and young adults grow up and start to be in situations where they need to have good hearing.” Taking a proactive stance, he continues, “These personal music devices are just one sort of noise exposure, but then people are exposed to other noises, as well, so it can be a cumulative thing. Kids in their adolescence overexposed to noise can develop damage, and that can accelerate in any other noise exposure later. You don’t want to start out behind the eight ball already having noise damage.”

Keep in mind that if there is so much existing noise that the iPod can only be heard when the volume is cranked way up (e.g., loud bus, noisy shopping area, restaurant chatter, et cetera), it’s time for a break rather a competition. Thus, even though the iPod may not seem dangerously loud, it can still be unsafe. Here’s the bottom line: Apps and music are meant to be enjoyed but keep the volume at a comfortable 60 decibel range and never continuously listen for over an hour and make sure to take breaks between albums.

Here are links to continue reading more on this topic:

- I. <http://copublications.greenfacts.org/en/hearing-loss-personal-music-player-mp3/>
- II. <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/05/05/2204490/how-to-prevent-loss-with-ipods.html>
- III. <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1881130,00.html>
- IV. <http://www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2009/05/18/ihuh/>

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