

HEARING

Listen up, but keep it down

Widespread use of MP3 players has hearing experts concerned

Have you ever been listening to your iPod and had someone try to talk to you — but you couldn't hear them?

If so, your iPod is probably turned up too loud. And if it is, there are a lot of reasons to turn it down.

Many kids today have portable MP3 players that they listen to regularly, and that has raised concern among experts who study hearing. If you listen to something that's even somewhat loud over a long period of time, it can cause hearing loss in the long run. At first you may not notice it, but it could become a problem, according to Anne Oyler, who is an audiologist.

"If they feel they want to turn it up for one song, that's fine. But if you listen to an iPod every day at a very loud level, gradually over time you're going to notice that your hearing has gone down," Oyler said. Think about it: No other generation has started listening to music through headphones and earbuds this young. So no other generation has ever been at such a high risk for hearing loss.

So how loud is too loud? Every song is different, and every device is different, but

Oyler said a good rule of thumb is that you should be able to hear what's going on around you, such as a person talking in a normal voice an arm's length away. (And that person should not be able to hear your music.)

Of course, you may not always want to hear what's going on around you. "I'm always able to hear the conversations. I may not be paying attention, but I can hear them," said Radhika Rajkumar, 13, of Washington, who said she listens to her iPod off and on all day.

Radhika said she and her friends are aware that loud volume can cause hearing loss, but it's more of an issue for kids who like to listen to music that she said "sounds better" when it's loud. Radhika said she only sometimes listens to those kinds of songs.

Oyler said she'd like to see kids remove themselves from the noisy world occasionally to experience quieter sounds and environments. "Listening to quiet sounds is good for you," she said. "It lowers your blood pressure. It relaxes you."

Radhika said she prefers to have her iPod on but does have one place where she likes to listen to something quiet: "Sometimes I like to just go sit in the backyard and listen to the birds, listen to nature. It can be really nice."

*Margaret Webb Pressler,
Washington Post*



Apple Inc.

Watch the sound level on your iPod.

Common sounds and decibel levels

- 0:** The quietest sound you can hear
- 30:** Whispering
- 60:** Normal conversation
- 70:** Recommended listening level (50 percent volume on Apple iPod with earbuds)
- 85:** Telephone dial tone (start to need hearing protection)
- 105:** Earbuds, volume all the way up
- 110:** Baby crying
- 120:** Ambulance siren
- 140:** Jet engine at takeoff

The right volume

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association has a Web site where you can play games and find more information on the appropriate volume for music in earbuds at www.listentoyourbuds.org.