Did You Know?

It’s not just your parent or your grandparent whose hearing may be slipping. A 25-year-old farmer can have the ears of a 50-year-old and not even know it!

- Nothing can restore lost hearing. Once it’s gone, it’s gone!
- BUT hearing loss caused by noise is preventable — and you can choose to prevent it.
- Noise-induced hearing loss can result from working around farm noise - even hand drills - without hearing protection.
- If you're exposed to loud noise on the farm you may already be losing your hearing.
- Hearing protection can increase your ability to hear your equipment or others' voices because it cuts down on the background noise. Some earmuffs have amplification circuits that may help even hearing impaired workers communicate better in noisy backgrounds.
- You can buy protective earmuffs with built-in radios that allow you to listen safely to your favorite sports or music while working. They make nice gifts.
- People have found that protecting themselves from noise reduces their stress, anxiety and fatigue at the end of the day.
- The best way to avoid hearing loss is to reduce your exposure by using quieter equipment or staying away from noise.

Sound Advice: Protect Your Ears from Damaging Noise

Exposure to noise above 85 decibels (dB) can cause permanent hearing loss.

It can even result from a single nearby shotgun blast, dynamite blast or other very loud noise.

How Long Is Too Long?

The red bar below shows how long it takes for a particular sound level to become dangerous to the human ear. For example, a chain saw has a sound intensity of about 109 dB. Without proper hearing protection, running a chain saw for only 2 minutes can cause hearing loss!

It only takes...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decibel Level (dB)</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>7.5 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>&lt;4 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>&lt;2 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>&lt;1 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you know someone with hearing loss, you know that conversation can be frustrating for both of you. A good hearing aid can help, because it amplifies the sound. However it does not make sound clearer the way glasses make your vision sharp. Hearing aids do not correct hearing the way glasses correct vision.

What's That Ringing?

Have you ever driven an open cab tractor for several hours or gone to a loud concert, then heard a ringing in your ears for the next hour or two? How would you feel if that ringing never went away?

That’s what happens to many people exposed to loud noise.

That ringing in the ears is called tinnitus, and while many people hear ringing, some hear hissing, roaring, whistling, chirping or clicking sounds. Tinnitus may show up before you even notice much hearing loss.

“My little girl doesn’t understand why I can’t hear what she is whispering in my ear. She says… ‘Mommy hears me when I whisper.’”

“I thought if I lost my hearing, it would be quiet. But that constant ringing keeps me awake at night and I can’t hear my friends very well on my cell phone.”

If you need to raise your voice to be heard an arm’s length away, the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing.

"A "decibel" is the unit used to measure the loudness of sound. Decibel levels for each item shown in the graph may vary."
How Can I Protect My Hearing?

You don’t have to have the hearing of a 50 year old by the time you’re 25. It’s up to you to protect your hearing!

- Identify noisy tasks around your farm and shop that may be harmful to your hearing.
- Wear hearing protection at all times whenever you are exposed to loud noise.
- Make hearing protection convenient. Stash earplugs in your pockets every morning when you grab your cell phone and keys. Hang canal caps or muffs on your tractor steering wheel, combine and lawn mower.
- Reduce equipment noise by replacing worn, loose or unbalanced machine parts. Keep equipment well lubricated and maintained. If you have been meaning to replace that loud tractor muffler, do it now.
- Limit your exposure to loud noise. Stay away from noisy equipment if you don’t need to be near it. Keep cab doors and windows closed.
- Have your hearing tested by a health care provider if you or someone else suspects a problem. Your family or friends may be the first to notice that your hearing is slipping.
- Keep children away from noisy areas and equipment.

There are hundreds of different styles of hearing protectors to choose from today. Everyone can find one that is convenient, easy to use, comfortable and fits his or her budget. “Hunter’s” or “shooter’s” muffs may work well for you. Hearing protectors are available on the internet and in local home improvement and farm stores.

Only trust your ears to products designed as hearing protectors. Cotton balls and other make-shift protectors can let noise pass right through.

“The best protectors are the ones you will wear all the time you are around loud noise.”
Fitting Formable Plugs

Size Matters To fit properly, a formable plug should be inserted so that most of the plug fits into the ear canal. While many formable plugs are “one size fits most,” different sizes are available. If you can’t get at least half of the plug into the ear canal, or if the plug can’t expand enough to stay firmly seated, you need a different size.

1 ROLL the formable plug between your thumb and forefinger(s) to compress it into a small, smooth, round cylinder.

2 REACH over top of your head and pull up or back on the top of your ear. This straightens out your ear canal so the plugs can go in far enough.

3 INSERT tightly rolled plug into straightened ear canal.

4 HOLD the ear plug in place for a few seconds after inserting to give it time to expand and seat itself in the ear canal.

Remember, the plug must be rolled down tightly before you try to insert it into your ear canal. You shouldn’t try to push a formable plug into your ear if you have not rolled it tight enough.

Fitting Premolded Plugs

Premolded plugs may come in different sizes or as “one size fits most.” Try out different sizes to find the ear plug that fits you best.

1 REACH over top of your head and pull up or back on the top of your ear. This straightens out your ear canal so the plugs can go in far enough.

2 INSERT premolded plug into straightened ear canal.

When you remove the plug, check to make sure there is a slight bend. (See the drawings above.) The bend means the earplug was inserted deeply enough to reach the bend in the ear canal. There should be no creases in the earplug.

Although considered disposable, formable plugs can be washed and used repeatedly.

Fitting Canal Caps

Canal caps are formable or premolded earplugs attached to a headband. Depending on the design, headbands may be worn over the head, behind the neck or under the chin. The headband allows canal caps to be hung around the neck when not being used. This makes them convenient to use when noise is not constant and you are taking your earplugs in and out frequently. Fitting and using canal caps is otherwise similar to fitting and using formable and premolded plugs.

Tips on Using Hearing Protection

When an earplug is properly inserted your voice will sound deeper or louder.

To check your fit, cup your hands over your ears and make a good seal. Count out loud while slowly cupping and uncupping your ears. If you have a good fit, your voice should sound about the same as you cup and uncup your ears. Try this with and without plugs. Hear the difference?

Use clean hands when inserting ear plugs, especially when rolling down formable plugs. Dirt can irritate your ears. When clean hands are not possible, ear muffs or premolded plugs with stems can be a better option.

When removing an earplug, slowly twist the plug to break the seal. If you pull the earplug out quickly without first gently breaking the airtight seal, you could harm your ear.
Common Noise Levels

Exposure to noise above 85 dB can cause hearing loss and tinnitus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise Source</th>
<th>Decibel Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firecracker</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain dryer</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chain saw</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock band</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular saw</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squealing pig</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor, in s</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand drill</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine (full)</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table saw</td>
<td>Very loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor, with cab</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine (full)</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor, enclosed cab</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal conversation</td>
<td>Soft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A "decibel" is the unit used to measure the loudness of sound. Decibel levels for each item shown in the graph may vary.

Young Farmers’ Guide for Selecting and Using Hearing Protection

If you need to raise your voice to be heard an arm’s length away, the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing.

Buying Hearing Protection

Hearing protection is available from many sources including on the internet and in home improvement and farm stores.

Remember, size matters! Not every earplug fits every ear. You may even need a different size for each ear. If you can’t get at least half of the plug into the ear canal, or if it can’t expand enough to stay firmly seated, you need a different size.

Earmuffs may work well for you. These are often worn during hunting and shooting. Some have a built-in radio as well as electronic circuits to limit the noise. They allow you to listen to your favorite sports or music. They are usually easy to fit and convenient to put on and take off. They can also make great gifts. However, if you wear glasses, earrings or have facial hair, ear plugs may be a better choice to ensure proper fit and sound reduction.

Formable

Premolded

Earmuffs

Replace your ear plugs or the seals of your ear muffs when they look worn or feel different.

If you are around noise at work, at home or doing the things that you enjoy, you need to protect your ears. If you don’t, you can expect to develop permanent hearing loss. You may also develop a permanent ringing, buzzing or roaring in your ears known as Tinnitus.

“Common Noise Levels”

“I expected to lose my hearing… but I thought it would be quiet.”

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