Headphones and Hearing Health

Frequently Asked Questions

Hearing problems are increasing in the U.S., even among teenagers and young adults. In New York City, 10% of young adults report ringing in their ears or hearing loss.

Does listening to music with headphones cause hearing problems?

- Listening to loud music with headphones can increase your risk of tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, and hearing loss if you:
  - frequently listen to loud music, even for short periods
  - turn the volume up too high to drown out background noise
- Exposure to noisy environments or loud music can cause hearing loss. The effects of noise exposure build up over time and hearing problems can occur many years after exposure.

What can I do to protect my hearing when using headphones?

- Reduce the volume.
- Limit listening time.
- Take regular breaks.
- Never listen at the highest volume.

Do some headphones have features built in to protect my hearing?

Yes. The main types of headphones are:

- In-ear headphones are inserted into the opening of the ear. They form a seal that helps block outside sounds so you can listen to music at a lower volume.
- Headphones fit over the entire ear. Some use noise-cancellation technology to reduce outside noise.
- Earbuds are worn on the outer opening of the ear and often come with iPods, smart phones and MP3 players. They don’t form a seal and may not keep out outside sounds.

What can I do to protect my hearing?

- Limit exposure to loud sounds.
- If you use headphones, use ones that cut down on outside noise.
- Wear earplugs or earmuffs in noisy areas.
- Stay alert to surroundings when wearing headphones or earplugs; never use headphones when biking, driving or crossing the street.
How do I know if my hearing is damaged?

- Early signs of hearing loss include trouble hearing conversations, ringing in the ears, or needing to turn up the volume on audio devices.
- Talk with your doctor about a hearing test if you have any of these problems.