Wearing Headphones Right Now? Follow These 5 Tips to Prevent Hearing Loss

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Whether you're wearing headphones or earbuds like AirPods to listen to your music, videos, movies or TV shows, it's important to remember that repeated exposure to loud noises can cause hearing loss. In fact, the World Health Organization estimates that over 1 billion young adults are at risk of permanent hearing loss caused by unsafe listening practices that could be avoided.

If you regularly wear headphones for work or pleasure, there are simple steps you can take to avoid hearing loss down the line.

1. Turn down the volume

Honestly, it's that easy: Just turn down the volume coming through your headphones or earbuds. Don't stop there, though. Make an effort to keep volumes from other sources low, too, such as when you watch TV at home.

Also, if you feel like you can't get the volume low enough, check to make sure your headphones don't have a separate volume control. For instance, I wear Aftershokz, and I can still hear the music when I turn my iPhone's volume down.

2. Use noise-canceling headphones

If you're like many people, you wear headphones to drown out other sounds -- and keep turning the volume up as external sounds get louder. To combat that perpetual increase in volume, try wearing noise-canceling headphones. You can try passive noise-canceling headphones, which work mainly via a design that limits outside sounds, such as high-density foam headphones that seal your ear from external sounds. You can also try active noise-canceling headphones, which constantly monitor the sounds around you and generate sound waves that directly cancel out the external noise.

3. Wear actual headphones, not earbuds

Although the two terms are used interchangeably, headphones and earbuds aren't really the same thing. "Earbuds" refer to the small, usually silicone or hard plastic, devices that sit snugly in your ear. "Headphones," on the other hand, refer to the types of devices that sit over your ears, usually covering the entire ear. The distance from sound to eardrum may be minimal between headphones and earbuds, but it's crucial in the long run.

4. Take listening breaks

If none of the above are an option for you, something as simple as taking breaks from your headphones can help prevent headphone-induced hearing loss. The longer you listen to loud music, the higher your chance of damaging your ears. Try taking a 5-minute break every 30 minutes or a 10-minute break every 60 minutes.

To be super safe, follow the 60/60 rule: Listen at 60% of your device's maximum volume for 60 minutes and then take a break.

5. Set a volume limit

Some devices allow you to set a custom volume limit in settings. On iPhone, go to Settings > Sounds & Haptics > Headphone Safety > Reduce Loud Audio to set a maximum. You can set it as low as 75 decibels, the equivalent of a loud vacuum cleaner and as high as 100 decibels, as loud as an ambulance siren. I have my set to 85 decibels, which is as loud as heavy city traffic.

Still uncertain? According to the National Institutes of Health, the best rule of thumb is to "avoid noises that are too loud, too close or last too long."