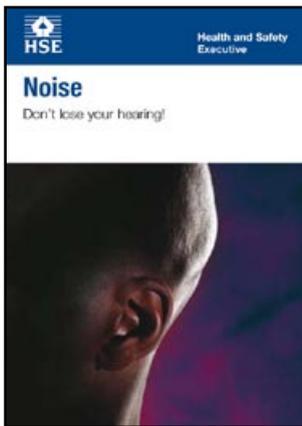


Noise

Don't lose your hearing!



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What is the problem with noise?

Noise is part of everyday life, but too much noise can cause **permanent** and **disabling** hearing damage. This can be hearing loss that gets worse over time, damage caused by sudden, extremely loud noises, or tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears).

With hearing damage, conversation becomes difficult or impossible, your family complains about the television being too loud, you have trouble using the telephone, and you may be unable to sleep. By the time you notice, it is probably too late.

However, there is no need for your hearing to be damaged by your work – your employer has a duty to protect you and should be working on measures to reduce the risk. You can play a part in helping your employer to protect you.

Is there a noise problem where I work?

If any of the following apply, your employer would be expected to be doing something about noise:

- the noise is intrusive – like a busy street, a vacuum cleaner or a crowded restaurant – or worse, for most of the working day;
- you have to raise your voice to have a normal conversation when about 2 m apart, for at least part of the day;
- you use noisy powered tools or machinery for over half an hour a day;
- the type of work is known to have noisy tasks, eg construction, demolition or road repair; woodworking; plastics processing; engineering; textile manufacture; general fabrication; forging or stamping; paper or board making; canning or bottling; foundries; waste and recycling;
- there are noises because of impacts (such as hammering, drop forging, pneumatic impact tools etc), explosive sources such as cartridge-operated tools or detonators, or guns.

Another sign that something should be done about the noise is having muffled hearing at the end of the day, even if it is better by the next morning. If you have any ear or hearing trouble, let your employer know.

What does my employer have to do?

Your employer should be looking at:

- using quieter equipment or a different, quieter process;
- engineering/technical changes to reduce the noise at source;
- using screens, barriers, enclosures or absorbent materials;

- laying out of the workplace to create quiet workstations;
- improved ways of working to reduce noise levels;
- limiting the time you spend in noisy areas.

Your employer should be consulting you or your workplace representatives on these things.

What do I have to do?

Co-operate Help your employer to do what is needed to protect your hearing. Make sure you use properly any noise-control devices (eg noise enclosures), and follow any working methods that are put in place.

Wear any hearing protection you are given Wear it properly (you should be trained how to do this), and make sure you wear it all the time when you are doing noisy work, and when you are in hearing protection zones. Taking it off even for a short while really reduces the overall protection you get, meaning your hearing could still be damaged

Look after your hearing protection Your employer should tell you how to look after it and where you can get it from. Make sure you understand what you need to do.

Attend for your hearing checks It is in your interest that any signs of damage to your hearing are detected as soon as possible, and certainly before the damage becomes disabling.

Report any problems Report any problems with noise-control devices or your hearing protection straight away. Let your employer and any workplace representative know.

Note: all of the above are legal duties on you.

Personal hearing protection

Hearing protection such as earmuffs and earplugs is your last line of defence against damage. Your employer should provide it, and train you how to use it and how to get replacements. There are many different types and designs available, and your employer should consult you and offer a choice.

Earmuffs They should totally cover your ears, fit tightly and have no gaps around the seals. Don't let hair, jewellery, glasses, hats etc interfere with the seal. Keep the seals and the insides clean. Don't stretch the headband – the tension is crucial to protection. Helmet-mounted earmuffs can need particular care to get a good seal around your ears.

Earplugs They go right in the ear canal, not just across it. Practise fitting them and get help if you are having trouble. Clean your hands before you fit earplugs, and don't share them. Some types you use only once, others can be re-used and even washed – make sure you know which type you have.

Semi-inserts/canal caps These are held in or across the ear canal by a band, usually plastic. Check for a good seal, every time you put them on. Follow the same general advice as for earplugs and make sure any band keeps its tension.



This sign indicates an area where you must wear hearing protection.

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This pocket card contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

This leaflet is available in priced packs from HSE Books, ISBN 978 0 7176 6510 5. A web version can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg363.pdf.

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