



MEDIA RELEASE

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FREQUENT EXPOSURE TO LOUD NOISE DAMAGES YOUR HEARING FOREVER

Hearing Awareness Week 20 – 26 August 2006

Noise induced hearing loss

One in six Australians are currently affected by hearing loss. That's over 3.55 million people. For more than a third of them the hearing loss was entirely preventable because it was caused by exposure to excessive noise. In fact, according to the World Health Organization, exposure to excessive noise is the **major avoidable cause** of permanent hearing impairment worldwide.

This year Hearing Awareness Week focuses on noise injury prevention. All around Australia special activities, free hearing screening, displays and advice on hearing problems will be held as part of a calendar of events to mark the week. A list of more events by State can be found on the Hearing Awareness Week website on www.hearingawarenessweek.org.au

Looking after your health is the current trend in society. We are encouraged to protect our skin, lower our cholesterol, prevent the onset of diabetes, and in general work towards slowing the ageing process. When was the last time you thought about your ears? Most people wear sunglasses but do little to protect their ears when exposed to excessive noise.

When do you know your ears have had enough?

Your ears won't tell you they've been damaged until it's too late. Unlike other parts of the body, which give out warning signals when they are being hurt, the delicate hairs in the ear take the full brunt of the noise and don't bounce back. This can happen gradually through years of exposure to dangerous levels of noise. Damage can also occur instantly if the noise is loud enough. Ringing in the ears (Tinnitus) is another sign that your ears have been damaged,

Wider impact of noise induced hearing loss

The World Health Organization states noise can cause hearing impairment, interfere with communication, disturb sleep, cause cardiovascular and psycho-physiological effects, reduce performance, and provoke annoyance responses and changes in social behaviour. The main social consequence of hearing loss is the inability to understand speech in normal conditions, which is considered a severe social handicap. This means it gets harder to talk to your friends in social settings and even going shopping can become difficult.

(references: Listen Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia, February 2006 by Access Economics Pty Ltd, World Health Organization Fact Sheet Nos. 258, 300 and Report on Prevention of Noise Induced Hearing Loss. Australian Hearing)

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