



# Household Items That Can Damage Your Hearing

*by Adam Dawson*

Hearing hazards are a part of normal, everyday life. From jackhammers to emergency vehicle sirens, there seems to be loud noises everywhere we turn these days. But how much is too much? And do the threats to our hearing health deserve as much attention at home as they do away from home?

## How Much Noise Is Too Much Noise?

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, prolonged exposure to any noise above 85 decibels (dB) can damage your hearing. For those of you living or working in larger cities, be aware that city traffic measures right around 85 dB. Subway trains can reach up to 90 dB, and police and fire sirens measure between 110 dB and 140 dB. You get the picture.

Now that we've covered the outdoors, let's take a look at indoor hearing hazards. Think you're safe at home? Think again! There are likely many more threats to your hearing health there than you realize. Below are a few to consider.

## Most Dangerous Household Items for Your Hearing Health

### 1. Cotton swabs

Is there anything louder than a bit of cotton on a stick? Well, yes, pretty much everything. But just because your Q-tips aren't causing a ruckus, it doesn't mean they're not dangerous to your hearing.

Consider the old adage: don't put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear. The problem

is that your eardrum is a bit delicate, and all it takes is a little extra pressure to damage it, and your hearing.

## **2. Tobacco**

Nicotine has been shown to cause blood vessels to shrink. When this happens, the flow of blood and oxygen to the ear is reduced, which has a slow, suffocating effect on your ears.

Also, there are substances in cigarettes – like nicotine – that damage hearing, cause tinnitus, and can negatively affect balance. If you're a smoker, you may be tempted to give up the habit for your lungs. But your ears will also thank you.

## **3. Medications**

Some medications have an ototoxic effect on the ears, which means they're toxic to the sensory cells. The damage and hearing loss can appear rapidly and suddenly, with common symptoms being vertigo and tinnitus.

However, hearing loss due to medications can also appear very gradually over time, to the point where you hardly notice. There are a number of pain medications, antibiotics, and chemotherapy drugs that have exhibited ototoxic effects. And you never know how long that damage will last. Sometimes hearing improves after discontinuing use, and sometimes the hearing loss is permanent.

## **4. Earbuds & Headphones**

According to the World Health Organization, the number one cause of hearing loss is loud music. The truth is our ears were never meant to listen to music that loudly, that closely, and for that long.

If your earbuds or headphones aren't noise-cancelling, as in blocking ambient outside noise, you're likely to turn up the music even more. And if you are using noise-cancelling headphones, you may be damaging your ears and missing "noise cues" like the honking from that bus you're about to steer into.

## **5. Children's Toys**

How many kids toys have you had to listen to, repeatedly, and at uncomfortable volumes? Just consider one seemingly innocuous accessory: the bike horn. That wonderful, high-pitched squeaking that can easily reach damaging noise levels if you're close enough to it. Also consider all the "squeeze-here-for-loud-noise" toys and dolls children have been playing with for years. Some of these may seem harmless, but they can also reach ear-damaging noise levels.

## **6. Appliances**

There are several household appliances that can certainly cause hearing loss. An alarm clock, for instance. In addition to disrupting that nice dream you were having, it can measure up to 80 dB, putting your ears right on the cusp of trouble. Your vacuum cleaner is likely to be between 70 and 90 dB, while your blender can reach up to 100 decibels.

However, there's one in appliance in particular that could be the most problematic: The hair dryer. We love beautiful, voluminous hair as much as anyone, but putting an appliance that can easily reach 90 dB a couple of inches from your ear canal every single day may not be worth it...

## **7. Power Tools**

Anyone who's ever done a DIY project in their home knows how noisy tools can be, especially power tools.

Think about everything that fits into this category – power drill (100 dB), gas lawnmower (105 dB), chainsaw (110 dB), etc. Next time you need to mow the lawn, saw some wood, drill something into the wall, etc., play it safe and wear hearing protection.

Your approach to the volume and variety of household items that can damage your hearing will no doubt be different for each group. When it comes to Q-tips and other small objects you feel compelled to put into your ears, just don't do it. Same goes for nonessential medications. And smoking isn't healthy for numerous reasons, so try your best to quit that. Better yet, never start!

In regards to listening to music, just turn down the volume. Listening to loud music all the time will definitely put you at risk of future problems. You

want to be able to still listen to the music you love 10 years from now, don't you?

For all other offending noises, just use a little protection. You can easily wear ear-muffs or earplugs when using any of the appliances and power tools you own. It may not seem like a big deal now, and may even be a bit inconvenient, but trust us: Future You doesn't want to deal with hearing loss. But then again, who does?

### ***About the Author***

*Adam is the Digital Marketing Coordinator at e3 Diagnostics. His interest in hearing healthcare is driven by his passion for music because he feels everyone should be able to clearly listen to Pet Sounds at least once in their life. In his free time, he enjoys playing video games, digging through record stores for classic vinyl, shooting hoops, and writing stories.*