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**Hearing Loss Update 2**

**Joe**

**This is Health Matters, continuing our report on hearing loss.**

**Kristen**

**Hearing loss is another sign that in one form or another, compromised health is the price we pay for the mechanized, industrialized, high-tech life we lead. For all of its so-called benefits, modern life seems to be a constant assault on the human body and it’s innate, genetic capacities.**

**Joe**

**Think of what our ancestors heard. People fully attuned to the sounds of the forest. People able to hear the almost silent approach of a deer, a slight shift of wind in the leaves. Acute hearing was a survival mechanism. A successful hunt depended on it. But acute hearing served more than the food supply. The sounds and rhythms of nature became part of human speech patterns. Became incorporated into the songs and ceremonies that kept people connected with one another and with all their relations.**

**Taushona**

**When you think of it that way, the loss of hearing is a profound loss of connection to the natural world. Preventing this loss, especially in children and young people, has become an imperative for all of us.**

**Kristen**

**Hearing loss is, literally, a form of brain damage. We tend to think of brain damage as cognitive. But loss of motor ability, loss of speech ability, and loss of hearing are all impairments in brain function.**

**Joe**

**Brain damage may be a helpful way to look at it. Scientists have found that loud music causes hearing loss by stripping insulation from nerve fibers that carry electrical signals from the inner ear to the region of the brain that receives these signals. When that protective coating is lost, the signals do not reach the necessary receptors in the brain. And that’s a form of brain damage.**

**Taushona**

**I never thought of hearing loss as brain damage.**

**Kristen**

**But technically it is. Scientists have been able to identify the specific brain cells damaged by loud noise, for example. And what’s odd is that loud music damages nerve cells the same way multiple sclerosis (sklur-O-sis) damages nerve cells. Multiple sclerosis, which is an immune system disorder, also strips the protective lining of nerve fibers.**

**Joe**

**Now that scientists have understood the brain cell mechanisms involved, they are hopeful that hearing loss from over-exposure to loud noise can be restored. The coating of nerve cells damaged by loud noise does re-grow in time. IF, and IF is everything here, the ears are protected from further loud noise.**

**Kristen**

**A big IF. But once you know you’ve lost hearing capacity and your know that you can re-grow the damaged cells, you are in control. You can protect your ears so that the nerve tissue can restore itself. Even better, you can start protecting your ears before you experience hearing loss. There are many good types of ear-plugs. There are also ear muffs, including the industrial ear muffs made to protect workers from loud noise in the workplace.**

**Taushona**

**There’s also simple avoidance. If you’re in an environment where the music is too loud, ask to have it turned down or leave. And carry ear plugs with you for those times when some ear wrenching noise from the environment suddenly descends upon you. Like q worker nearby ripping up concrete with a pneumatic drill.**

**Kristen**

**Seriously. Carrying earplugs is not an extreme, health-nutty thing to do. Think of it this way -- carrying ear plugs is not that different from carrying a handkerchief or tissues. In a way, protecting your ears is just another form of good hygiene.**

**Joe**

**The mechanics of hearing are delicate. Over time our exposure to noise and other factors like disease and genetic inheritances, wears down those sensitive mechanisms.**

**Tashone**

**And loud noise is a huge factor. Not just for teenagers listening to music full blast. 44% of carpenters and 48 % of plumbers have some hearing loss. Other vulnerable occupations include the military, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and transportation.**

**Kristen**

**But you don’t have to be a sitting duck for hearing loss. You can protect your hearing and the hearing of the young people in your life by avoiding loud noise, by using ear plugs and by keeping the volume level of listening devices and speakers at 60 percent of their capacity.**

**Joe**

**Health Matters is a production of KIDE Hoopa CA.  Produced and written by Cynthia Poten. Engineered by Joseph Orozco.  Our readers were Kristen Marshall, Taushona and Joseph Orozco.  For this audio and more information, visit our download area at  www.kidefm.org. Thank you for listening. Your health adds to the health of our community.**

**Sources and Links**

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