

MP3 users risk hearing damage

Millions listen to music on MP3 players on a daily basis, but the popular personal stereos cause hearing damage in high numbers of listeners, especially among young people.

MP3 players make listening to music easy wherever you are, but the noise level combined with sustained listening on a daily basis on the convenient and portable music system can be highly damaging, according to recent studies.

In an Australian study the researchers stopped 55 random passersby with personal stereos in the streets of Melbourne and Sydney. The researchers borrowed the music players and measured the volumes at which they were played. They found that 25 percent of the respondents played their music at noise levels putting them at risk of hearing damage. The average noise exposure level was determined to be 79.8 dB.



Young people in danger zone

MP3 players are particularly popular among young people, prompting a team of researchers from the British RNID hearing organization to examine the use of MP3 players among 18-24 year-olds.

They found that 39 percent of the young adults listened to their personal stereos on an average of one hour or more per day. As many as 42 percent of the youngsters believed that they were listening to the music at excessive volumes. A full 66 percent reported that they frequently experience ringing or hissing noises in their ears. Such noises may be a first indication that the personal stereo is played too loudly, according to the researchers.

RNID finds the results of the study to be highly disturbing. The organisation recently responded with its Don't Lose the Music awareness campaign.

"There is a danger that long-term use at high volume will permanently damage people's hearing. RNID's Don't Lose the Music campaign is urging people to be aware of the risks so they can continue to enjoy music for longer. Protective filters for in ear headphones are available from many high street stores and regular breaks should be taken from listening to personal stereos," said Brian Lamb, Director of Communications at RNID, in a press release.

Sources: "RNID research reveals huge risk of hearing loss amongst MP3 player and personal stereo users", May 16, 2005, www.rnid.org.uk, and "Personal Stereo Noise Exposure", www.nal.gov.au.