



Local News

MP3 players can cause permanent hearing loss

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By JANE SMITH, for kgw.com

For teens, they're as universal as backpacks. MP3 players are cracked up as loud as the ear can take.



KING photo

An MP3 player

"It cancels out all the noise, so I can hear the music," said 18-year-old Ari Bacharach.

But the very source that brings music to your ears, could cause permanent hearing loss.

"Because the earphones that come with iPods are the ones that sit inside your ear canal and there's no place for the noise to leak out," said Christi Sperry, an audiologist at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center.

Sperry says the trapped sound can kill delicate hair cells inside your ear. It's a phenomenon called "MP3 Ear." Hair cells send sound impulses to the brain and once the cells are damaged, they don't grow back. Sperry says the damage can be subtle.

"They're not going to notice the changes, it's very gradual," she said.

So how loud is too loud? The average alarm clock is set at 80 decibels. Listening to an MP3 players at that volume for more than an hour can cause hearing damage, at least temporarily.

"If you've ever experienced ringing in your ears, that's a definite warning sign," said Sperry.

iPods can play uninterrupted for hours because they hold thousands of songs. Sperry says the longer you listen, the more you put your hearing at risk. She recommends you listen to your iPod for no more than an hour at a time.

