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- Workplace safety - noise pollution

Workplace safety - noise pollution

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Summary

- Damage to hearing occurs when noise levels are higher than 85 decibels, which is about the loudness of heavy traffic.
- The degree of loss depends on the loudness of the noise and how long you are exposed to it.
- Once hearing is damaged, it can't be restored.

Excessive noise levels over a long period of time will damage your hearing. This may happen so gradually and painlessly that you may not notice the minor deterioration from one day to the next. Excessive noise in the workplace presents a risk of hearing damage and other health problems.

The parts of the ear that process high frequency sounds are usually the first to be affected. The degree of hearing loss depends on the loudness of the noise and how long you are exposed to it. Sudden explosive sounds, such as gunshots, can cause immediate damage.

Some people exposed to excessive noise develop tinnitus, which is described as a constant ringing sound. For most cases of noise-induced hearing loss, there is no cure. Hearing aids only amplify sounds and can't replace normal hearing.

Associated effects of constant noise pollution

Apart from damage to hearing, exposure to constant and excessive noise can cause other health problems including:

- headache
- elevated blood pressure
- fatigue
- irritability
- digestive disorders
- increased susceptibility to colds and other minor infections.

The workings of the ear

The vibration of air molecules makes up a sound wave. Low frequency sounds have waves that are far apart, while high frequency sounds have waves that are bunched together.

Sound waves are funnelled from the outer ear into the middle ear, where they vibrate the eardrum. The three tiny bones lying on the other side of the eardrum pick up the vibration and pass it on to the inner ear.

The vibration is picked up in the inner ear by a small, spiral shaped organ called the cochlea. Hairs on the cochlea sense the vibration and pass on the message to the brain via the cochlear nerve. These sensitive hairs are bent, damaged and broken by excessive noise. The resulting scar tissue can't conduct sound. The parts of the ear that process high frequency sounds are usually the first to be affected.

Dangerous decibels

The loudness of noise is measured in decibels. Sensitivity to noise differs from one individual to the next, but experts believe that damage to hearing occurs when noise levels are higher than 85 decibels, which is about the loudness of heavy traffic.

The risk of hearing loss increases as the noise becomes louder. Length of exposure is important too. For example, it is not recommended to listen to noises of 109 decibels for any longer than two minutes at a time.

If you have to raise your voice or shout to be heard, or if your ears ring or sounds seem muffled afterwards, then the noise level was too loud and harmful.

Reducing noise pollution in the workplace

Noise levels can be measured using a sound level meter, which detects the pressure of sound waves as they move through the air.

Reducing exposure to excessive noise in the workplace can be accomplished in many different ways:

- Change or modify equipment.
- Locate the equipment in a more isolated area, or soundproof the room.
- Make sure that people spend time working in quiet areas too.
- Try to run noisy equipment early or late in the day when fewer people will be exposed.

- Use personal hearing protection such as ear plugs or ear muffs.

Ongoing monitoring of noise pollution

Occupational health and safety officers can offer advice and information on reducing noise in the workplace. Noise levels should be regularly monitored and work practices continuously improved to preserve the hearing of workers.

In accordance with the [Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007](#) (regulation 3.2.11), employers that are required to provide employees with hearing protection to use in the workplace must provide workers with hearing tests:

- within three months after the employee starts the work that requires the hearing protection, and
- at any time when reasonably requested to do so by the worker's health and safety representative, and
- in any event, at least every two years.

Once hearing is damaged, it can't be restored. See your doctor immediately if you suspect any noise-induced hearing loss.

Where to get help

- Your manager or supervisor
- Your Elected Health and Safety Representative and your workplace occupational health and safety coordinator
- WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089 (toll free) – for general enquiries
- WorkSafe Victoria Emergency Response Line Tel. 13 23 60 – for employers to report fatalities and **serious** workplace incidents or injuries, 24 hours. 7 days
- Your doctor
- Your union

References

- *An introduction to noise at work*, Department of Commerce, Government of Western Australia. [More information here.](#)
- *Noise*, Environmental Protection Agency, Government of New South Wales. [More information here.](#)
- *Noise*, WorkSafe Victoria. [More information here.](#)
- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007*, Victorian Government. (pdf) [More information here.](#)

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- [Animals and child safety](#)

[Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets...](#)

- [Babies and safety](#)

[Most injuries to babies do not occur by chance - many are predictable and largely preventable...](#)

- [Baby care - moving from cot to bed](#)

[Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring...](#)

- [Baby furniture - safety tips](#)

[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)

- [Bicycle safety and children](#)

[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety and become safer road and bicycle users...](#)

- [Burns and scalds - children](#)

[Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom...](#)

- [Child safety and injury prevention](#)

[By making a few practical changes to your home, you can dramatically reduce the risk of injury to your child...](#)

- [Child safety in the car](#)

[Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries...](#)

- [Eating tips for young toddlers](#)

[Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full...](#)

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[Teach your child strategies for responding to mobile phone bullying...](#)

- [Playgrounds and child safety](#)

[Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity...](#)

- [Poisoning and child safety](#)

[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)

- [Road and traffic safety for children](#)

[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road users...](#)

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[Scooters can travel at fast speeds and falls and collisions are disturbingly common...](#)

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[Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water...](#)

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- [Asbestos in the home](#)

[Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma...](#)

- [Chemicals in the home](#)

[Learn how to safely store and dispose of household chemicals, and how to respond when a person is poisoned...](#)

- [Electric shock](#)

[Always disconnect the power supply before trying to help a victim of electric shock...](#)

- [Gas heating - health and safety issues](#)

[If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use...](#)

- [Greywater - recycling water at home](#)

[When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden...](#)

- [Groundwater](#)

[Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...](#)

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- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)

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- [Ladder Safety – Nick's story](#)

[Injuries associated with ladder falls have been steadily increasing in Australia, especially among men aged 60 years and older doing work in and around the home...](#)

- [Ladder Safety – Paul's story](#)

[Paul was sanding the exterior of his house when he overreached and fell more than two metres from his ladder...](#)

- [Ladders Safety Matters - Paul \(video\)](#)

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[Make sure your doctor knows about every medicine you take, including vitamins...](#)

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[Falls are a major cause of injury for older people. Find out how you can prevent falls around your home...](#)

- [Pest control in the home](#)

[If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible...](#)

- [Swimming pools - water quality](#)

[Check your swimming pool regularly to make sure the water is safe for swimming...](#)

- [Vision loss - safety around the home](#)

[There are many ways to improve home safety for people whose vision is deteriorating...](#)

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[Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...](#)

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[Don't advertise a party via SMS or the internet to limit the risk of gate-crashers and violent situations...](#)

- [Solariums \(sunbeds and tanning beds\)](#)

[There is no such thing as a safe solarium tan...](#)

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- [Exercise safety](#)

[Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries...](#)

- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](#)

[Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...](#)

- [Heat stress and older people](#)

[People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather...](#)

- [Heat stress – preventing heatstroke](#)

[Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures...](#)

- [Hot weather and child safety](#)

[Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration...](#)

- [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat](#)

[Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...](#)

- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)

[Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current...](#)

- [Hypothermia](#)

[The early responses to hypothermia will be moving around, seeking shelter, hair standing on end \(goosebumps\) and shivering...](#)

- [Walking - safety and environmental issues](#)

[Choose a route that is appropriate for your age and fitness level. Warm up and cool down with a slow, gentle pace to ease in and out of your exercise session...](#)

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[Safe driving is up to every individual on the road. You can be a safe driver by being alert and ready to take action at any time...](#)

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- [Travel safety tips](#)

[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)

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[When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...](#)

- [After a flood – returning home safely](#)

[When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...](#)

- [Bushfire aftermath - safety tips](#)

[Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...](#)

- [Bushfire preparation advice](#)

[Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...](#)

- [Bushfire smoke](#)

[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...](#)

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[You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires...](#)

- [Talking to children about bushfire risk](#)

[Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...](#)

- [Urban flash floods - FAQs](#)

[Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease...](#)

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[When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...](#)

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[Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body...](#)

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[Using a computer can contribute to problems of the muscles and joints, eyestrain and overuse injuries of the arms, wrists and hands...](#)

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[Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury...](#)

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[Any confined space on a farm can be dangerous and the threat may not be apparent until it's too late...](#)

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[Hand and finger injuries are the most common crush injuries that occur on Victorian farms...](#)

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