

Part 4. Protect Your Ears!

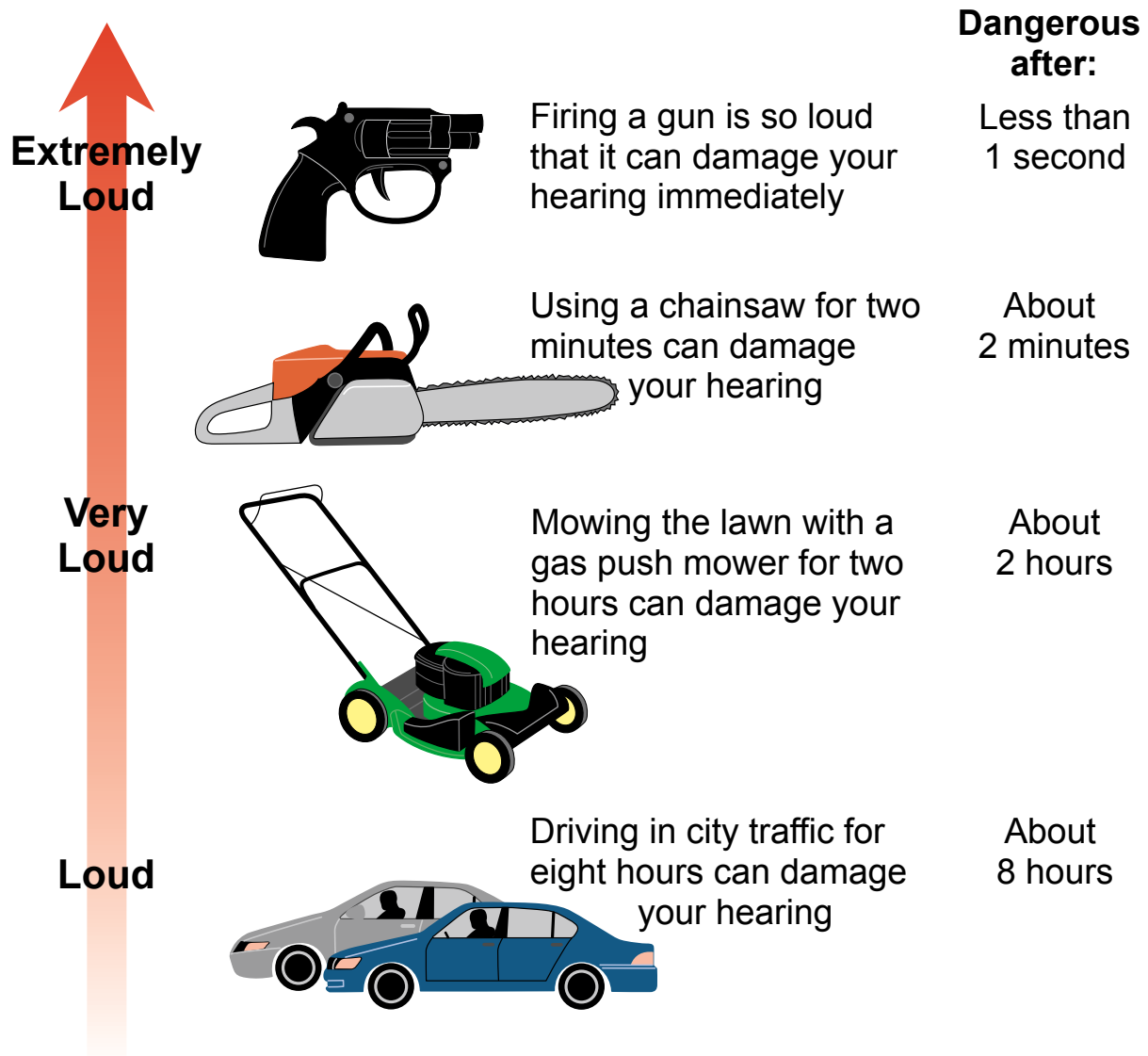
In Part 1 we explained that we cannot change the tinnitus. But, we can change our *reactions* to it. Parts 2 and 3 gave step-by-step instructions to learn how to manage reactions to tinnitus. Part 4 focuses on protecting your ears from very loud sound.

Loud noise can cause hearing loss and tinnitus. If you already have hearing loss or tinnitus, loud noise can cause *more* damage and *make the tinnitus worse*. The louder a sound is, the faster it can damage your hearing (see figure on next page). Power tools, lawnmowers, and chain saws are very loud. You should never use them without hearing protection (earplugs and/or earmuffs). Loud music, whether live or recorded, can cause damage. (If you listen to music for your tinnitus, you should always play the music at soft levels.) Even traffic noise can cause damage if you are exposed to it for many hours in one day. Driving with the window open for several hours at a time can cause noise damage, especially in the ear by the window.

You should always wear hearing protection when you are around loud noise. You need to find hearing protection that is handy and easy to use. There are many different types of earplugs and earmuffs. You can get them from:

- hearing specialists
- sporting goods stores
- industrial supply sources
- home improvement stores
- websites on the internet (see Appendix J)

The Louder a Sound is, the Faster it Can Damage Your Hearing



Standard Earplugs

Standard (non-custom) earplugs are low cost and “one size fits all.” Yellow foam earplugs are the most common. All earplugs can protect against loud noise but they must be used properly. Foam earplugs need to be inserted almost completely into the ear canal (with very little of the plug left outside of the canal - see the photo below). If they are not used properly, then they might not give you enough protection from sound. You can try different earplugs to find what works best for you. Some dealers offer “trial packs” with a variety of earplugs.



correct use



incorrect use

Custom Earplugs

Custom earplugs are custom molded to the ears. An audiologist can have them made for you. Custom earplugs usually are very comfortable, easy to use, and can be used for years.

Photo of custom earplugs courtesy of E.A.R., Inc.



Hi-fi Earplugs

“Hi-fi” earplugs reduce loudness equally for both low and high pitches. This avoids the muffled effect that is caused by most earplugs. Hi-fi earplugs were designed for musicians who need to hear music clearly. These earplugs also work well when you need to hear speech in a noisy environment.



Electronic Earplugs

Electronic earplugs allow you to hear soft sounds, but very loud sounds, like gunshots, are reduced. These earplugs are used mainly by hunters. Non-electronic earplugs also are available for this purpose.



Earmuffs

Earmuffs can be used *instead of* earplugs or *along with* earplugs. Earmuffs should be worn along with earplugs when you are around extremely loud noise like gun fire or chainsaws. It is important that earmuffs fit snugly around the ears to get a good seal. Wearing glasses or a hood under the earmuffs will cause them to be less effective.



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