

To Hear For A Lifetime: Listen Up

(NAPSA)—In case you haven't heard, a flurry of recent publicity is stirring up worries that portable audio players such as iPods (MP3 players) will cause hearing problems if they are played too loudly.

Experts on hearing loss are glad that the public is learning to turn down the volume on these popular items. However, some believe all of this media coverage about portable audio players is diverting attention from other noises that are more likely to cause hearing loss.

"Portable listening devices are perfectly safe when users take personal responsibility and adjust the volume to safe listening levels. But it's even more important to protect yourself when you're exposed to other sources of noise that are part of modern life," according to Dr. Sergei Kochkin, Executive Director of the not-for-profit Better Hearing Institute (BHI). "About 30 million Americans are exposed to dangerous noise levels every day. That means noise from car stereos, motorcycles, airplanes, lawnmowers, loud movies, firecrackers and gunshots, to name a few."

Excessive noise damages the delicate hair cells inside the inner ear. This can cause both hearing loss and ringing of the ears. Close to 40 percent of hearing loss can be attributed to overexposure to loud noise, according to the National Institute of Health. If you have to raise your voice and shout when someone is within an arm's length, that means the noise is probably in the dangerous range.



About 40 percent of all hearing loss comes from overexposure to loud noise.

When it comes to iPods and other portable audio players, Kochkin suggests turning down the volume to about 60 percent of the maximum level if you listen for an hour and making it even lower if you listen for longer than that.

Another vitally important precaution is to get your hearing checked regularly. If hearing loss is detected and it affects your quality of life, it's vital to take the next step and do something about it, such as getting a hearing aid.

According to Kochkin, "Hearing loss is not a minor problem for millions of people. It can cause lost income on the job, communication difficulties, psychological stress and problems in your family life."

For more information on how to prevent and treat hearing loss, or to take a quick hearing check, go to the BHI Web site at www.betterhearing.org or call (800) EARWELL.