

Noise Exposure of Music Teachers: Early Warning Signs of Hearing Loss

Malcolm Tattersall, November 2005
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About this document

- **This is a 2023 pdf version of an older web page**, part of a series.
- Neither content nor links have been updated. Links may not work.
- Please visit malcolmtattersall.com.au/music/noise-exposure-of-music-teachers/ for an introduction to the whole series.

Associated documents

Noise Exposure of Music Teachers: Introduction

Defining the Problem

Teaching Strategies to reduce noise exposure

Approximating Noise Exposure in small-group woodwind teaching

Hearing Loss, Noise Exposure and the Law

Hearing Protection for music teachers

Links

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Not sure how good your hearing is? The only way to be sure is to have it tested, but here are a few warning signs:

- When you sit down next to someone who is watching TV, you often grab the remote and turn it up a click or two.
- People around you in a lecture seem to be hearing all right but you're not.
- Other people are chatting away happily and enjoying themselves in noisy surroundings (e.g. at a party) but you are having so much difficulty following the conversation that you would rather be elsewhere.

All of these situations offer direct but informal comparisons between your hearing and that of the people around you. Isolated incidents are not significant but a pattern may be telling you something.

- You often don't quite catch the difference between words like 'pay' and 'bay' or 'tie' and 'die.'

Consonants are shorter than vowels and are the first to be lost.

- Looking at someone when they are talking to you helps you understand them much better.

You may have a habit of helping your hearing with a bit of subconscious lip-reading. If so, it has probably developed so slowly that you didn't notice.

- You notice ringing or buzzing in your ears, often or continually.

This kind of sound is called 'tinnitus.' Tinnitus is not a direct symptom of hearing

loss but is often associated with it. Short-term tinnitus, e.g. after a loud concert, is a response to short-term over-exposure and repeated short-term over-exposure leads to hearing loss. Chronic tinnitus is often associated with long-term hearing loss. If it is at a very low level, it will only be heard in very quiet surroundings.

- You can hear crickets or cicadas quietly shrilling away in the garden at night even when others can't.

You may be hearing your own tinnitus; see above.

- Loud noises annoy you more - in fact, sound louder to you - than they used to.

This may seem odd but it is in fact quite typical of people with hearing loss. The phenomenon is known as 'recruitment.'

None of these symptoms are necessarily signs of immediate or severe problems. As I said on the introductory page, this information is correct to the best of my understanding but is not definitive, so **don't panic** and **do seek more information** if you have concerns.

The Health & Safety Executive [UK] website (general) and the articles by Chasin (general but with specific reference to music and musicians) and Newman (tinnitus) shown on my [Links](#) page are good starting points for further reading but ultimately the only way to be sure of the state of your hearing is to visit an audiometrist or audiologist to have it tested.