

Teaching about hearing can save young people's ears

March 5 2012

Many adolescents frequently expose their ears to loud sounds, for example from portable music players. Some of them may think that 'the doctor said that my hearing is good, so I guess I can handle the loud volume'. A new doctoral thesis from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, shows that research-based teaching in school can be used to positively change adolescents' awareness and behaviour.

Eva West, researcher at the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, has developed research-based teaching material about sound, hearing and auditory health that she has tested on nearly 200 students in grades 4-8. The students' knowledge about sound, the function of the ear, hearing and tinnitus was tested before and after the teaching. She also studied the students' attitudes towards high sound levels.

Challenging for students

The results show that it was challenging for the students to understand the concept of sound and sound transmission due to its abstract nature. Students tend to think of sound as a material phenomenon and not as what it really is: a movement that is transmitted. They for example think that sounds occur when material [sound waves](#) collide with the components of air, when in fact material sound waves do not even exist. 'A teacher who is aware of this perception and who repeatedly assesses the students' knowledge can plan the teaching accordingly, and thus

improve the learning process,' says Eva West.

Tinnitus

Five percent of the students indicate that they are often bothered by tinnitus. As many as 35-70 percent, depending on the age of the students, say that they have experienced [tinnitus](#) at some point. A majority of the students knew very little about the function of the ear before the teaching, which means that their understanding of the importance of taking good care of one's hearing was limited.

'Teaching young people about how hearing works and that there are small [hair cells](#) that we need to be careful with may help them better understand messages such as "Be careful with your hearing",' says West. Her results show that the students' attitudes towards sound levels and hearing were healthier after than before the teaching, and there were also signs that their behaviour changed in a healthy direction.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

Citation: Teaching about hearing can save young people's ears (2012, March 5) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-03-young-people-ears.html>

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