

# Audiologist offers tips for better speech and hearing

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The Memorial Day parade. Road and building construction. Fourth of July fireworks. Outdoor rock concerts.

All are signs that warm weather has arrived. And all are very noisy.

"Noise-induced [hearing loss](#) can be permanent. The damage to the ear cannot be repaired, but there are options to improve the hearing," says Candace Blank, AuD, audiologist chief, Loyola University Health System. "For example, [hearing aids](#) have become much more innovative and many have improved, contemporary and discreet designs."

According to research, one in 10 Americans has hearing loss that affects the ability to understand normal speech. While aging is the most common cause of hearing loss, exposure to excessive noise also can damage the ability to hear sounds in high pitches.

"Listening to music using ear buds can expose the ear to very high volumes and can damage hearing in young people which often cannot be repaired," says Dr. Blank. "That this is totally preventable is the ultimate sadness." About 3 in 5 Americans, primarily youth, are prone to noise-induced hearing loss in this manner.

According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology, here are the registered levels for common sounds:

- 30 [decibels](#) – soft whisper

- 50 decibels – rain
- 60 decibels – normal conversation/computer keyboard typing
- 70 decibels – expressway traffic
- 85 decibels – earplugs are recommended at this noise level
- 90 decibels – subway, lawnmower, shop tools
- 100 decibels – chainsaw, snowmobile, drill
- 110 decibels – power saw
- 115 decibels – loud rock concert, sandblasting, car horn
- 130 decibels – race car
- 150 decibels – fireworks/jet engine takeoff
- 170 decibels – shotgun

"Be aware of your surroundings and it is not a bad idea to carry earplugs when attending loud events," says Dr. Blank, who cares for construction and factory workers, frequent air travelers and seniors in her practice at Loyola University Medical Center.

"Those who have careers that require exposure to continuous excessive noise should treat this as an occupational health hazard and invest in the proper equipment," says Blank.

Here are some [hearing protection](#) tips from Dr. Blank:

- Shield your ears. "Earplugs are available at all cost levels and readily available at many retail outlets," says Dr. Blank. Specialty custom plugs with filters designed for various noise sources are available through audiologists.
- Keep ears dry. "Summer means swimming and running through water sprinklers. Trapped moisture in the outer ear swells and causes pain," says Dr. Blank. "Earplugs designed for swimming are a much more affordable alternative to a physician visit for an ear infection."
- Plane pain. "Summer travel often means plane travel. "Yawning,

swallowing, chewing gum or sucking candy can be effective in unplugging ears," says Dr. Blank. "EarPlanes filtered plugs for airplane travel are available for more severe cases."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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