

Noisy workplace may wreak havoc on your heart

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(HealthDay)—Loud noise at work doesn't just threaten your hearing, it

might also boost your blood pressure and cholesterol levels, a new U.S. government report suggests.

"Reducing workplace noise levels is critical not just for hearing loss prevention—it may also impact [blood](#) pressure and cholesterol," said Dr. John Howard, director of the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which conducted the study.

"Worksite health and wellness programs that include screenings for [high blood pressure](#) and cholesterol should also target noise-exposed workers," Howard said.

Loud noise is one of the most common workplace hazards in the United States, with 1 in 4 Americans reporting a history of exposure to high levels of noise while at work, the researchers said.

"Noisy environments in the workplace represent a neglected risk factor for high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol," said Dr. Robert Glatter, an [emergency room](#) physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

"The [emergency room] provides an ideal opportunity to screen patients for elevated blood pressure and those with hypertension when they come for medical evaluation for any particular condition," he said.

"Facilitating [emergency room] screening for specific occupations that are associated with an elevated risk for high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol can help save lives," noted Glatter, who was not connected to the study.

High blood pressure and [high cholesterol levels](#) are known risk factors for heart disease.

In the study, the NIOSH scientists analyzed data from the 2014 U.S. National Health Interview Survey and found that 41 million Americans had a history of noise exposure at work, and 14 percent reported exposure within the last year.

While 12 percent had hearing problems, 24 percent had high blood pressure and 28 percent had high cholesterol. Work-related noise exposure could be linked to 58 percent of hearing problems, 14 percent of high blood pressure cases, and 9 percent of high cholesterol cases, the study suggested.

Industries with the highest rates of worker noise exposure were mining (61 percent), construction (51 percent), and manufacturing (47 percent).

"A significant percentage of the workers we studied have hearing difficulty, high blood pressure and high cholesterol that could be attributed to noise at work," study co-author Liz Masterson said in a news release from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NIOSH is part of the CDC.

"If noise could be reduced to safer levels in the workplace, more than 5 million cases of hearing difficulty among noise-exposed workers could potentially be prevented," she added.

"This study provides further evidence of an association of occupational [noise exposure](#) with high blood pressure and high [cholesterol](#), and the potential to prevent these conditions if [noise](#) is reduced," Masterson concluded.

But the study did not prove that a noisy workplace actually caused high blood [pressure](#) and [high cholesterol](#) levels; it only showed an association.

The study was published March 14 in the *American Journal of Industrial*

Medicine.

More information: The U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration has more on [workplace noise](#).

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