

Does living in a loud city hurt your hearing?

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Living in a city can be exciting for the cultural institutions, events, and attractions, but all that fun can take a toll on your ears. The sound of city life can be so loud that it damages the hair cells in the inner ear, leading

to hearing loss, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and increased sensitivity to sound.

For instance, the sound of a subway train passing can hit 100 decibels—enough to cause permanent hearing damage with prolonged exposure.

"Hearing is important for so many reasons. I encourage everyone to be proactive about hearing health and have their hearing checked," says Jessica Galatioto, AUD, director of audiology at Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC). "For adults, it is important to identify the loss and get treatment early."

Her advice applies to a lot of people: Hearing loss is the third most common health problem in the United States among [older adults](#), according to the American Academy of Audiology. Children are also at risk. About one out of eight kids between the ages of 6 and 19 have noise-induced [hearing loss](#), says the Academy.

How to preserve your hearing

Hearing loss is a gradual process, and the damage caused by [noise exposure](#) is irreversible. But Galatioto suggests these smart habits to help maintain your hearing health over time:

- **Wear hearing protection:** One way to protect your ears from noise-induced hearing loss is by wearing earplugs or earmuffs, which reduce the intensity of sound.
- **Use noise-canceling headphones:** Noise-canceling headphones can help reduce the amount of noise that enters your ears. These can be especially useful for people who commute on public transportation or work in noisy environments.
- **Take quiet breaks:** Avoid noisy areas or take breaks in quiet

spaces to give your ears a rest. If you need to be in a loud environment, limit your time there.

- **Be aware of your surroundings:** Pay attention to the [noise levels](#) around you and take steps to protect your hearing. If you notice the volume on your headphones is too high, turn it down. If you're at a concert or in a loud bar, stand away from the speakers.
- **Get your hearing checked:** Regular hearing checkups can detect any hearing loss early, so you can prevent further damage.

Provided by Columbia University Irving Medical Center

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