

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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## Hearing and Balance

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Since the Industrial Revolution, we humans have been exposed to more loud sounds than any other time in history. Jet engines at takeoff, jack hammers, amplified music, fireworks, chain saws and so many other sounds in our environment can all contribute to wearing down our acute sense of hearing that most of us are fortunate to be born with.

If uncorrected, hearing loss can lead to isolation, depression, loss of brain matter and an increased risk of dementia. It can also cause issues with balance and put us at a greater risk of falling. That is because in order to maintain our sense of balance, our brains have to coordinate information from our inner ear, our eyes, the sensory information from the bottoms of our feet, and our major joints. It is a sensitive, interdependent system in which at least two of these elements must work well.

According to the book “Mayo Clinic on Hearing & Balance” by Jamie M. Bogle, Au.D., Ph.D., “... *the vestibular labyrinth...together with the cochlea—is contained in your inner ear. The vestibular labyrinth is your primary balance organ. The brain uses this inner ear organ to tell where your head is relative to gravitational space, and whether your head or body is changing its position.*” So protecting our hearing is essential for maintaining balance.

In order to preserve our precious hearing, it is important to turn down the volume when we can. Here are some tips about Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) published by Timothy Higdon, the President and CEO of The Hearing Health Foundation (July 29, 2021).



## 9 Things to Know About Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) By Timothy Higdon

The evidence is undisputed. What you don't know can damage your hearing for life.

1. Noise-induced hearing loss is probably the biggest global public health emergency you've **never** heard of. The World Health Organization (WHO) says 1 of every 5 U.S. teens (ages 12–19) has a measurable hearing loss likely from loud noise.
2. The WHO calls hearing loss a global health crisis with 1.1 billion young people at risk from damaging sound, largely from personal listening devices turned up too loud.
3. Protect yourself from hearing loss. Experts give this advice: Turn down the volume on personal listening devices to 60% of volume or lower. Take a listening break every hour. Use earplugs in noisy places or situations such as sports stadiums or in the presence of heavy machinery or loud music.
4. Untreated hearing loss has serious health consequences: It can harm the heart and brain; lead to mental health problems like depression; and cause sleeping problems and even cognitive decline. Untreated hearing loss impacts school and job performance, and income.

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**9 Things to Know About Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL)**  
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5. Hearing loss can result from a one-time exposure to loud sound—up close at a concert—or from loud noise over prolonged periods. Be aware of the noise level around you and protect yourself using earplugs or by moving away from the noise, urges the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD).

6. Damage to hearing is cumulative, says the NIDCD. The louder the noise and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of permanent damage.

7. Over-the-ear or noise-canceling headphones that block out the sound around you make them a better choice than in-ear earphones or earbuds. Without competing outside noise, you're less likely to turn up the volume to unsafe levels—just make sure you remain aware of your surroundings.

8. The CDC considers sound at 70 decibels and below to be safe. Some headphones can top out at 100 decibels or more, which can permanently damage hearing in just 15 minutes. People regularly experience dangerous decibels--in restaurants and bars, on subways, and at the gym.

9. Hearing loss is usually subtle, occurring gradually; most people may not be aware they are affected. Often those close to us spot the problem first. It's a good idea to check your hearing from time to time. Online hearing tests (such as the W.H.O.'s "hearWHO" app) are quick and easy and can alert you to a problem.

**Audiology at Carleton-Willard**

Audiology services are available in the Clinic every other Tuesday with Dr. Louis Femino. Dr. Femino has over 30 years of experience in Hearing Health Care and has been coming to CWV since 2007. Services include hearing evaluations, prescription and fitting of hearing aids and assistance with the selection of hearing devices. Dr. Femino provides education, counseling and follow-up as needed.



If you or a loved one are experiencing hearing loss or have questions about your hearing please contact the Clinic to schedule an appointment.

