



Media Release

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Put a plug in it to hear better during the summer season

With summer upon us and the official start of the silly season just around the corner; Australian Hearing has released new research via its research division, the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL), on the positive effect ear plugs have in noisy leisure environments.

The research found that ear plugs don't just protect the hearing; regular users find that they can enhance music and make conversation easier in loud venues.

This good news comes just in time for the traditional summer season's concerts, parties and live music. The research paper titled *Hearing protection for clubbers is music to their ears*, by Dr Elizabeth Beach from NAL, was recently published in the December issue of the Health Promotion Journal of Australia.

Dr Beach and her colleagues from NAL interviewed regular clubbers to determine the advantages and disadvantages of wearing different types of ear plugs. Those participants who regularly wore either custom made or ER-20 ear plugs, both specifically designed for loud music environments, found that they either enhanced the music or had no discernable impact on sound quality other than lowering the volume to a comfortable level.

Wearers of custom and ER-20 ear plugs at loud music venues described them as discreet and comfortable, while ER-20 ear plugs have the added bonus of being inexpensive, and convenient to carry around.

"Many of the young people surveyed found it easier to communicate with friends when wearing ear plugs, and in some cases felt that the sound quality of the music was improved," Dr Beach said.

NAL recommends ear plugs as one method of hearing protection available to concert goers and night clubbers, but say there are other ways young people can protect their hearing.

"People can take breaks from loud venues by going outside or spending time in chill-out rooms, turning down the stereo at home or in the car and listening to MP3 players at safe levels," Dr Beach said.

"They should also be aware of the signs of potential hearing damage, such as ringing in the ears. If your hearing feels muted or dull after exposure to loud noise, this can also be a warning sign," she added.

Earlier this year, Australian Hearing released new research on the impact of loud leisure noise on the hearing of young Australians. Titled *Binge Listening*, the report found that 13 per cent of young Australians under the age of 35 are being exposed to leisure noise levels greater than the maximum acceptable industry level. Research conducted by NAL as part of that study showed noise levels recorded at nightclubs ranging between 91 and 106 decibels. Noise at 100 decibels can cause damage after 15 minutes.

While most young people are aware of the link between exposure to loud noise and hearing damage, many are not changing their behaviours or considering themselves to be at personal risk. According to Mr Steven Grundy, Managing Director of Australian Hearing, this is a growing issue for the hearing health of young Australians.

“The effect of noise on hearing is cumulative and many young people are at risk of hearing loss from their current leisure activities,” Mr Grundy said.

“While we want people to continue to have fun, we encourage young Australians to take care of their hearing and take active steps to protect their ears in loud venues. Once hearing is damaged, it cannot be restored to its original state,” he said.

For further advice on how to protect your hearing during the festive season, go to www.hearing.com.au or call 131 797. To check your hearing over the phone, call Telscreen™ on 1800 526 500.

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Media contact: Narelle Levett, Public Relations Coordinator, Australian Hearing on 02 9412 6752