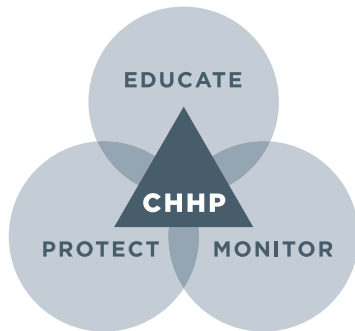


## Department of Defense Comprehensive Hearing Health Program



The Hearing Center of Excellence (HCE) leads the effort to promote the prevention of hearing loss in the military through promotion of its Comprehensive Hearing Health Program (CHHP).

- Noise is the number one risk factor faced by all service members, regardless of occupation or specialty.
- Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is the invisible injury of military service.
- NIHL can disrupt communication, degrade job performance, and diminish overall quality of life.
- Many service members believe that hearing loss is an inevitable by-product of military service. However, it does not have to be that way.

In order to alleviate NIHL in the military, the CHHP includes health education, hearing protection device training and fitting, and annual hearing health surveillance.

## Hearing Loss Prevention Strategies

Protective measures that help prevent noise-induced hearing loss are included in the **EARS<sup>2</sup>U** hearing loss prevention strategy:

**EDUCATE** yourself about hazardous noise (85 decibels or greater).

**ADJUST** the volume of your personal listening devices.

**RECOGNIZE** and reduce noise hazards.

**SELECT** and properly use hearing protection devices.

**SEEK** annual hearing health services from an audiologist.

**UNDERSTAND** the consequences of unprotected exposure to noise, and that it can cause permanent inner ear damage.

Use these strategies in order to reduce the risk of NIHL. Maintaining your hearing preserves your ability to identify and react to threats, communicate mission-critical information, and to achieve your mission safely and effectively.

*It's a noisy world. Protect your hearing.*



# HEARING LOSS PREVENTION



HEARING.HEALTH.MIL

HEARING.HEALTH.MIL



## We Live in a Noisy World

We work around loud machinery and in noisy environments. We often enjoy noisy hobbies, such as hunting and attending sporting events and concerts.

Without the use of properly fitted hearing protection, noise becomes most hazardous to your hearing when it is at 85 decibels (dB) for more than eight hours. Higher levels of noise become hazardous with much shorter exposure times. For example, your hearing can be damaged within 15 minutes if you are exposed to noise levels of 100 decibels like that of a motorcycle or snow mobile.



## Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is invisible, painless, progressive, and permanent. NIHL is one of the most common occupational injuries in the military. It can occur gradually over time or it can result from a single exposure to loud noise. NIHL is painless and there are no external visible changes.

You probably will not be aware of NIHL until it interferes with your ability to communicate. Initially, you may notice communication difficulties in noisy environments, such as in combat or near vehicles, aircraft, weapons fire, or industrial operations. Gradually, it becomes more difficult to hear and communicate. This can adversely affect your mission's success.

## Warning Signs and Symptoms

Warning signs of NIHL due to hazardous noise include:

- You hear buzzing or ringing in your ears, known as tinnitus
- You have a feeling of fullness in your ears after leaving a noisy area, such as a concert venue
- You can hear people talking, but have difficulty understanding what they are saying



## Hearing is a Critical Sense

Imagine how difficult — and dangerous — life could be without the critical sense of hearing. Crucial information from sound is available from all directions, through darkness, during sleep, and around obstacles. Whether you serve on the ground, at sea, or in the air, your ability to hear is vital to individual and unit performance, and to overall mission success.

### COMMUNICATION

Hearing is crucial to speech perception and production.

### SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Hearing allows you to judge your orientation to and distance from events happening around you. It allows you to localize new and unfamiliar sounds.

### JOB PERFORMANCE

You learn and receive critical information through verbal instructions, communicating with team members, and reporting. You must work with and listen to others in person and by phone, radio, and Internet voice conferencing.

### SAFETY

On and off the field of combat, you are alert to the sounds of danger, such as gunfire, approaching vehicles, aircraft, sirens, and hazardous weather. Through your hearing, you can identify and locate fellow warfighters in distress.

### QUALITY OF LIFE

Your ability to hear enables you to fully appreciate and engage in family life, team sports, nature, and music.