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Portable music player ear buds causing concern

2/8/06

10 **Warning for music listeners**

Turn them down and turn them off. That's the advice of a local audiologist who say I-Pods and other portable music players are causing teens and young adults to lose their hearing. The big culprits aren't the portable devices themselves, but the tiny ear bud style headphones that the music players use.

Teens blasting their I-Pods or MP3 players is a common sight outside most high schools but is too much of a good thing ruining the ears of young people?

Audiologist Carrie Adamson and Andrew Morabito are with **Advanced Hearing Aid Center** of Greece. They are going into the classroom to teach local kids about the dangers of playing their music too loud. The lesson is part of "operation hear-safe" a program aimed at raising awareness about the causes and symptoms of hearing loss.

Instead of books pens and paper the kids just have to bring their I-Pod or MP3 player and an open mind or ear to class. "There have been doctors and audiologists what have tested the ears and are seeing hearing loss in children or young adults at age 20 that have hearing loss like a 50 year old would," said Adamson.

The culprits are certain types of earphones known as ear buds. They are more harmful than ordinary earphones because they fit deeper into the ear canal. "With the buds you have to produce more sound than the ones that go over the ear because they are closer to the ear drum so there's more pressure which is more damage," said Adamson.

Teens playing their I-Pod with ear buds in at full blast can reach up to 120 decibels, the equivalent to the noise level of a concert. In just 7and a half minutes at 120 decibels permanent hearing loss occurs.

A recent study found one out of 12 college students already has a hearing loss.

Senior Shannel Ashford listens to her music that way a lot--for several hours a day. "I have it on at a certain level then I gradually increase the volume eventually all the way."

Audiologists say that's the problem. Insert earphones can boost the signal by as much as six or nine decibels. It doesn't sound like much but it's the difference between the sound of a vacuum cleaner and a motorcycle.

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As part of the special class the kids get a lesson in how the ear works and how damage occurs.

Adamson says turning down the volume at least by half can save your hearing.

"Start at the lowest setting and see how long it takes to get to the highest then go back half that."

She says kids usually turn up the volume to block outside noise around them. She suggests buying noise-canceling headsets. They help reduce outside sounds so you can keep volume at a more reasonable level. Also limit your listening time to about an hour a day.

If you are worried about your child's hearing a simple screening can determine if damage has occurred.

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