

**HEALTH LINK****● Listening Lower**

Do you ever listen to your favorite music on headphones? Many people like to use headphones while they exercise. Terrific! But doctors believe that this habit may be putting people's hearing at risk.

**The Blood Brain Drain**

Aerobic exercise, including walking, jogging, skating, dancing, and competitive sports, is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. However, when you exercise, more blood is sent to your arms and legs than is sent to your ears. The inner ear is more easily damaged when the blood flow is lowered. Once the cells of the inner ear are damaged, they cannot be replaced. A study in Sweden showed that hearing loss doubles when loud noise and aerobic exercise are combined!

**How Loud Is Too Loud?**

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires hearing protection for workers exposed to 95 decibels for 4 hours. A lawn mower emits 95 decibels. If workers are exposed to 100 decibels for 3 hours, they must wear hearing protection. People generally listen to headphones at levels between 90 and 115 decibels.

**Why So Loud?**

Most people turn the volume up as they continue to listen to music because their ears adapt to the volume. However, permanent hearing loss can occur at well below painful or even uncomfortable levels. Another concern is that hearing loss is often gradual, starting at high frequencies. The loss goes unnoticed until the damage is quite extensive. Generally, more problems occur when noise is louder, lasts longer, or occurs frequently.

**What to Do**

How can you protect your hearing and still use those headphones? Keep the volume of your headphones as low as possible, and try not to raise the volume once it is set. Then always remember this: If a person 1 m away has to shout in order for you to hear, the volume is too high. However, this test does not work for headphones with muffs that fit around the ear. The volume is probably too high if your hearing is dulled after you remove your headphones. This usually goes away quickly, but it may become permanent if you keep the volume high.

## HEALTH LINK

### ● **Listening Lower** *continued*

#### **Sound It Out**

Obtain a sound meter, and survey the sound levels around your school. Measure the levels at dances and other noisy locations. Report your findings to your class, and discuss ways to lower your exposure to loud sounds. You may just save someone's hearing!