

Health & SCIENCE



Simple Precautions Can Prevent Hearing Loss

Although summer is a time for fun with friends and for family celebrations, many summertime activities can endanger your hearing health. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) warns that even a one-time exposure to extremely loud noises, such as lawn mowers, fireworks, rock concerts, power boating, and other loud recreational activities can permanently damage hearing.

"Noise-induced hearing loss is usually gradual and painless, but unfortunately, permanent," said Larry Higdon, ASHA's vice president for professional practices in audiology.

"Even a one-time exposure to extremely loud noise, like a firecracker for example, can cause permanent hearing loss."

Knowing what noises can cause damage is important. Prolonged or repeated exposure to any noise above 85 decibels can cause hearing loss. Most lawn mowers, motorcycles, chainsaws, and powerboats produce noise at or above 85 decibels.

Personal stereos may account for the highest sources of noise-induced hearing loss--sound from personal stereos has been measured at levels as high as 110 decibels. Permanent hearing loss can occur from exposure to impulse noise at or above 140 decibels, this includes some rock concerts and firecrackers.

To protect your hearing this summer, ASHA recommends the following tips:

- Wear hearing protectors such as ear plugs during fireworks and when attending concerts. Using cotton in your ears does not block sound.

- Turn down the volume on stereos and personal listening systems.

- Use hearing protection when engaging in noise-producing activities, such as lawn mowing, power boating, using power tools, or other loud household appliances.

- Limit the length of time of exposure to loud noise during your summer festivities.

Twenty-eight million Americans have a hearing loss, according to ASHA. Nearly half are the result of

damage from excessive noise. Individuals with a hearing loss, or who suspect they might have a hearing loss, should consult a certified audiologist. Audiologists are hearing health care professionals who specialize in preventing, identifying, and assessing hearing disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment including hearing aids and other assistive listening devices.

For a free brochure about noise and hearing loss or for referral to a certified audiologist in your area, call ASHA's Helpline at 1-800-638-8255 or write to ASHA, Information Resource Center, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland 20852.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for more than 82,000 audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech language and hearing scientists. Speech-language pathologists are the professional who identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems including swallowing disorders.

Help, Hope Mental Illness

BY BARRY LUCAS

When I was growing up, people weren't mentally ill. They were "crazy", nuts, or "off their rocker." One way in which today is better than "the good old days" is that we have a more enlightened attitude about mental health. We realize that mental illnesses are among the most common health problems. Approximately one in five American adults suffer from a diagnosable mental illness in any six month period - that's almost 57 million Americans a year.

These illnesses strike individuals old and young. White and African-American, rich and poor, school dropouts and college graduates. They can affect the person's ability to think clearly, act appropriately and relate to others and reduce the chances for a happy, productive life.

A mental illness is a medical problem--much like diabetes or heart disease. And, like physical illness, mental disorders can be treated. Today, scientists know that many people suffering from mental illnesses have imbalances in the way their brain metabolizes certain chemicals. Too much or too little of these chemicals may result in depression, anxiety or other disorders. This knowledge has allowed pharmaceutical company researchers to develop medicines that can alter the way the brain produces, stores and releases these chemicals,

thus alleviating the symptoms of some mental illnesses.

Due to medical progress, about 90 percent of the people with mental illnesses today will improve or recover. If you or someone you know has a mental disorder, the important thing is to get help. One of the most common mental illnesses is depression. Here is a brief summary of its symptoms and treatment.

Everybody's unhappy sometimes, but major depression is more than a case of "the blues." It's a "whole-body" illness with long-lasting, disabling symptoms, such as:

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" feeling and periods of crying
- Loss of interest in things that were once enjoyable
- Decreased energy and/or fatigue
- Insomnia, or sleeping too much
- Changes in appetite and weight
- Decreased ability to concentrate and remember
- Hopelessness and thoughts of suicide

If you experience these symptoms or observe them in a loved one

contact a doctor right way. Reports indicate that 15 percent of people with severe depression eventually take their own lives, so don't wait. Effective treatments are available. They include many forms of psychotherapy (talk therapy) and a variety of non-habit forming antidepressant medicines. The exact way these medicines work differs, but most antidepressant medicines alter the metabolism of brain chemicals. They alleviate many depressive symptoms, including loss of appetite and sleep problems, and tend to have minimal side effects.

Pharmaceutical companies currently have 64 medicines in testing for mental illnesses, including 13 for depression, to learn more about mental illnesses, current treatments and new medicines on the horizon. Send for a free booklet, "New Hope for Depression and Other Mental Illnesses." Write to PhRMA, 1100 15th Street, N.W., Washington D.C. 20005. Additional brochures on depression are available from the National Institute of Mental Health. Call 1-800-421-4211.

Travel Hints and Wellness

Advice is available in a free brochure from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association titled, Spectators' Wellness Guide to the Games. Created to help the estimated two million Olympic Games' spectators have a safe and memorable stay while cheering for their favorite athletes in Atlanta, The brochure outlines basic health information for the smart traveler.

Oregon Health Division Obtains Federal Exemption

Oregon Health Division's public health laboratory has become the second state in the nation to receive a full exemption from federal clinical laboratory licensing regulations, Audrene Horton, Laboratory Licensing Program Manager, announced today. "This exemption means that as of June 13, Oregon laboratories will benefit from local control, lower fees, and less red tape," she said.

The exemption is an example of successful government streamlining, according to Horton. Since 1970, Oregon's public health laboratory has

licensed clinical laboratories under state law. The passage of the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) in 1988 allowed for "state exempt" status if a state had a program that met CLIA regulations and was approved by the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA).

"This exempt status change will be mostly transparent to laboratories because the requirements are essentially the same. However, the labs will benefit because they will only see one set of paperwork, regulations and fees," Horton stated.

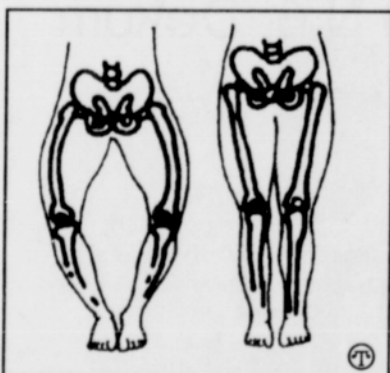
The Health Division's laboratory licensing program has already begun working with laboratories across the state to achieve a smooth transition. Washington became the first state to achieve CLIA exemption in October, 1993, and New York achieved a partial exemption in August, 1995.

"Oregon must maintain equivalent regulations, licensure and comparable biennial inspections of moderate and high complexity labs. HCFA will monitor the state program on a routine basis," Horton said.

Medical Milestones

New Advances In Limb Treatment

(NAPS)—What it would be like to be excluded from sports because one of your legs is shorter than the other or because you are bowlegged? Try to imagine not being able to reach shelves in a supermarket or the teller counter at the bank because you are only 3-feet-4 inches tall.



For most of us, these are realities we will never have to face. Unfortunately, until recently, help for those who do suffer these conditions was difficult to find.

Using a surgical-quality, computer-controlled erector set, orthopedic surgeons are able to fix bone deformities and a variety of limb problems and can even help patients reach a more functional height.

The newly-opened California Center for Reconstructive Orthopedics in Pasadena, California, combines leading edge technology and a specialized technique to treat limbs damaged or deformed by disease, accidents or birth defects in children and adults.

Doctors have found that any segment of a limb can be lengthened with a procedure that begins with a surgical cutting of bone. Titanium pins, which are attached to a steel frame assembled around the limb, are then inserted into the bone. Following surgery, tiny motors are attached to the frame and programmed by a computer to gradually pull the bones apart. New bone tissue forms in the gap between the bones.

For more information call California Center for Reconstructive Orthopedics at (800) 240-8081.

The whole secret of the study of Nature lies in learning to use one's eyes.

—George Sand

The bad news is, kids will be kids.

The good news is, it's covered.



If it exists, they will run into it, fall off of it, or swallow it. And when they do, the last thing you want to worry about is whether or not your medical claim is going to be denied.

Well, with Kaiser Permanente, you have one less thing to worry about. That's because at Kaiser, you never even have to file a claim. Just bring them in to your neighborhood Kaiser facility, and they're covered. Just like that.

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