

Listen up! MP3 players can cause hearing loss

It seems most kids won't go anywhere these days without personal portable media players with earphones. iPods, MP3 players and other personal music players not only are the hottest devices for adolescents and preadolescents, the devices' ear buds (earphones) and personalized accessories also make them somewhat of a fashion statement.

But parents should be wary of the potential damage these devices can cause to a child's hearing, and theirs, too.

"They are very loud. Physiologically, we do know that the ear does not like and does not do well with persistent noise above 90 decibels," said Michael W. Shannon, M.D., M.P.H., FAAP, chair of the AAP Nexus on Environmental Health. Earphones generally emit noise frequencies up to 130 decibels.

While it may be impossible to prevent kids from listening to personal audio players at a loud level — after all, kids will be kids — parents should explain to their children the potential ramifications of long-term exposure to such noise.

Dr. Shannon and the American Academy of Pediatrics offer these precautions to help protect hearing:

- **Use earphones that do not seal off the ear from outside air.** The ideal

headphones fit softly on the ear or are disc-shaped and get placed on the outer ear. Those that fit tightly around or in the ears are the worst, but also are the most popular because of their higher sound quality.

- **When in doubt, turn it down.**

Although volume levels vary from player to player, anything above 80 to 85 decibels poses a real risk of injury to the ear. "To give you a sense, a vacuum cleaner is about 83 decibels," said Dr. Shannon. An easy rule of thumb is to turn the volume low enough so that normal conversation can still be heard.

- **Pay attention to changes in noise levels while using the device.**

Sound levels also vary from song to song. If one song plays at a normal



level and the next is much louder, turn it down.

Because the headphone generation is relatively new and hearing is fairly resilient in younger years, Dr. Shannon said the full extent of potential damage these audio players can cause is still unknown.

"Parents do need to be concerned, particularly since kids are using these at younger and younger ages."

— Trisha Koriath