

100% avoidable

Employers have a legal duty to protect their employees from the harmful effects of noise at work. The best solution is to get rid of the noise at source. When this is not possible the employer has to make suitable ear protection available free of charge (this is always the last resort).

RNID Information Line can give you detailed information about the conditions featured in this leaflet.

TUC can give you more information about what you should expect from your employer.

How noisy is your workplace?



TUC, Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS
Telephone 020 7636 4030
Fax 020 7636 0632
healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk
www.tuc.org.uk

RNID Information Line
19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL
Telephone 0808 808 0123
Textphone 0808 808 9000
Fax 020 7296 8199
informationline@rnid.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk

1749/0305 Registered Charity No. 207720



How noisy is your workplace?

Noise is one of the most underestimated workplace risks. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that 170,000 people in the UK suffer hearing damage, tinnitus or other ear conditions as a result of exposure to excessive noise at work. The issue is particularly prevalent in the manufacturing, construction, call centre and music industries. But the sad fact is noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) is irreversible – and **100% preventable**.

Why does noise damage your hearing?

Our ears are full of sensitive hair cells, pictured below, that allow us to hear. Exposure to noise can damage these cells and they can't be repaired. Damage can be caused by a single, loud noise such as an explosion (which can make you deaf immediately), or by longer exposure to loud noise such as machinery or music.



What hearing problems can noise cause?

Prolonged exposure to loud noise can cause permanent hearing loss, and other long-term hearing problems:

- **Noise-induced hearing loss** happens when you have been regularly exposed to damaging levels of noise over a long period. The hearing loss will be similar in each ear and will get worse if you continue to be exposed to the noise.
- **Acoustic trauma** can occur when you are exposed to a loud noise for a short period of time, eg if you are close to an explosion. The sudden hearing loss is often more severe in the ear that was closest to the sound.
- **Tinnitus** is the word for noises that some people hear in the ears or in the head – buzzing, ringing, whistling, hissing and other sounds. These sounds do not come from outside the head although they may sound as if they do.
- **Hyperacusis** can develop after sudden exposure to high sound levels. If you have hyperacusis you may find certain sounds uncomfortable or painfully loud even when they don't bother other people. You may also find that the area around your ear is painful.



The effect on people's lives

A new hearing loss or condition can have surprising effects:

- Everyday activities such as watching TV, using a phone, going to the theatre or cinema, and even keeping up with a conversation in a group can become difficult. This can lead to feelings of isolation and depression. Sometimes people withdraw from society rather than simply getting help for their hearing loss.
- When tinnitus or hyperacusis starts (particularly if it's sudden) it is common to feel anxious, stressed, frightened, unable to concentrate and frustrated because it feels like no one else understands.