

## Noise

138 million people are regularly exposed to noise levels labeled as excessive by the Environmental Protection Agency. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that Americans cite noise - more than crime, litter, or traffic - as the biggest problem affecting their neighborhoods.

\* According to an audiologist at the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, included in noise-related problems are high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, cardiovascular deaths, strokes, suicides, degradation of the immune system, and impairment of learning. Also, noise is associated with an increase in aggression and a decrease in cooperation.

\* Bad moods, lack of concentration, fatigue, and poor work performance can result from continual exposure to unpleasant noise. Psychiatric hospitalizations are higher in noisy communities.

\* According to one study, children in noisier neighborhoods experienced higher overnight levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), marginally higher resting systolic blood pressure, and greater heart rate reactivity to a stress test - all signs of modestly elevated physiological stress.

\* Compared to children from quieter neighborhoods, children living near airports or busy highways tend to have lower reading scores and develop language skills more slowly.

\* A study at Texas A&M University found that women may be more sensitive to noise than men. Also found was that when children have no control over prolonged exposure to noise, it can lead to learned helplessness syndrome, a condition linked to forms of depression and to poverty.

Toxic noise is the most common occupational disease and the second most self-reported occupational injury. Ten million people have hearing loss because of toxic noise in the workplace. The Deafness Research Foundation defines toxic noise as any noise that can damage or destroy hearing. It is present in the workplace of approximately 30 million Americans.

Not just loud or sudden noises provoke a stress response. Low-intensity noise has a subtle yet insidious effect on our health and well-being. Chronic low-level noise negatively influences the brain and behavior. Low-level noise elevates psychophysiological factors and triggers more symptoms of anxiety and nervousness.

\* **Environmental psychologists at Cornell found that low-level noise in open-style offices results in higher levels of stress and lower task motivation. Also, it might contribute significantly to health problems such as heart disease and musculoskeletal problems.**

\* British investigators found that a greater amount of neighborhood problems, including noise, was associated with residents being three times as likely to say their physical function was impaired and twice as likely to report poorer health.

A few minutes of dedicated quiet each day reduces stress levels and offers a way to appreciate things that are obscured by noise. It has been found that some people go weeks without even using five minutes for quiet contemplation or reflection. The LA Times reported about a teenager who spends 10,000 minutes a month on his cell phone.

\* Recently, the network controlling wireless BlackBerry communication devices went down for 14 hours; many users claimed their lives were thrown into turmoil.

\* The results of one experiment by students at Seattle University found that on a typical day, a student checked her e-mail five times, turned on her TV three times, checked phone messages twice, browsed websites, and listened to her Ipod.

Sources: NIH, U.S. Library of Medicine, The Franklin Institute, Seattle Times, Natural Health, In Touch Magazine, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. This Health Bulletin is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.