



Pump Down the Volume

Noise can be harmful to your health.

by Sari N. Harrar

Protect your heart with a healthy diet, exercise, aspirin...and earplugs? Frequent exposure to loud noises at home or work raises blood pressure and your risk of heart attack, two new studies warn.

When 46 factory workers wore blood-pressure monitors on the job, University of Michigan scientists found that their blood pressure rose 2 points for every 10- to 13-decibel increase in workplace noise, which ranged from 40 to 100 decibels. Meanwhile, a German study discovered that living in a noisy neighborhood--where traffic raised decibel levels above 60--tripled a woman's risk of heart attack; men's risk doubled.

Excess noise increases stress hormones that constrict arteries, says Sally L. Lusk, PhD, RN, who led the factory research. When it's loud enough that you have to raise your voice to be heard by someone 3 feet away, put in earplugs. Lusk recommends wearing them to loud social events, too, and buying appliances with low-noise ratings.