

Noise-cancelling headphones may cause hearing problems

20th February 2025



Wherever we look nowadays, we see people wearing headphones or earbuds. They are becoming increasingly popular with the younger generation, for work and for leisure. However, a new report from the BBC suggests noise-

cancelling earphones could lead to hearing loss. The BBC interviewed doctors and audiologists (hearing specialists) at audiology departments in five UK hospitals. The doctors told reporters they are seeing many young people who are finding it more and more difficult to process sounds. The young patients say they can hear sounds, but they're often not sure where the sounds are coming from. The doctors say noise-cancelling earphones could be the problem.

The BBC spoke to Dr Renee Almeida, an audiologist at London's Imperial College. She said there was an increase in the number of young people complaining about poor hearing. She said people need to hear many kinds of sounds. One important listening skill is to focus on and decide which sounds are helpful. Our ears must filter out sounds we don't think are important. Dr Almeida said: "There is a difference between hearing and listening. We can see that listening skills are suffering." Another audiologist suggested that headphones can lead to bad listening habits. She said we can "forget" to hear important sounds, like cars beeping. Headphones may even cause problems in hearing spoken words.

Sources: bbc.com / nypost.com / ndtv.com

Writing

Headphones are bad for us. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

nowadays / headphones / popular / generation / hearing / hearing loss / sounds / complaining / poor hearing / skill / listening / bad habits / cars beeping / words

True / False

- 1) The article says everyone wears headphones and earbuds. T / F
- 2) Headphones are becoming more popular with older people. T / F
- 3) The BBC interviewed doctors who were experts in hearing. T / F
- 4) Some young people don't know where the sounds they hear come from. T / F
- 5) More and more older people are complaining about hearing problems. T / F
- 6) A doctor said people need to hear different kinds of sounds. T / F
- 7) The doctor said hearing and listening are the same. T / F
- 8) The doctor said headphone use could make people forget some sounds. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. nowadays | a. being damaged |
| 2. generation | b. experts |
| 3. interviewed | c. age group |
| 4. specialists | d. useful |
| 5. sure | e. result in |
| 6. increase | f. certain |
| 7. helpful | g. at the moment |
| 8. suffering | h. difficulties |
| 9. lead to | i. questioned |
| 10. problems | j. rise |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What can people do if they have poor hearing?
- c) What are your favourite sounds?
- d) What are your least-liked sounds?
- e) What's the difference between hearing and listening?
- f) What sound is it really important to hear?
- g) What will headphones be like in the future?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the audiologists?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Wherever we look | a. loss |
| 2. popular with the younger | b. are coming from |
| 3. earphones could lead to hearing | c. beeping |
| 4. more and more difficult | d. generation |
| 5. they're often not sure where the sounds | e. sounds are helpful |
| 6. the number of young people complaining | f. skill |
| 7. One important listening | g. to process sounds |
| 8. focus on and decide which | h. habits |
| 9. lead to bad listening | i. nowadays |
| 10. hear important sounds, like cars | j. about poor hearing |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of headphones?
- Which are better – headphones or earbuds?
- Why are headphones more popular with the younger generation?
- What kinds of headphones do you like?
- Do you worry about hearing loss because of headphones?
- What are the good and bad things about headphones?
- How often do you use headphones?
- What is your hearing like?

Spelling

- Wherever we look dawsonya
- people wearing headphones or budersa
- They are becoming increasingly plarpuo
- hearing psciatsilse
- more difficult to sespcor sounds
- young atstinpe say they can
- people namciigponl about poor hearing
- Our ears must eliftr out sounds
- listening skills are sngiefufr
- bad listening tbshia
- cars bipneeg
- problems in hearing opesnk words

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. c	3. i	4. b	5. f
6. j	7. d	8. a	9. e	10. h

Role Play

Role A – Babies Laughing

You think babies laughing is the best sound. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their sounds. Also, tell the others which is the least likeable of these (and why): the wind, birds chirping or popcorn popping.

Role B – The Wind

You think the wind is the best sound. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their sounds. Also, tell the others which is the least likeable of these (and why): babies laughing, birds chirping or popcorn popping.

Role C – Birds Chirping

You think birds chirping is the best sound. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their sounds. Also, tell the others which is the least likeable of these (and why): the wind, babies laughing or popcorn popping.

Role D – Popcorn Popping

You think popcorn popping is the best sound. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their sounds. Also, tell the others which is the least likeable of these (and why): the wind, birds chirping or babies laughing.

Speaking – The Best Sounds

Rank these with your partner. Put the best noises at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| • Babies laughing | • Birds chirping |
| • The wind | • Computer starting |
| • Classical music | • Rain falling |
| • Alarm clock | • Popcorn popping |

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	T	5	F	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.