

- Hearing

## Could using headphones too loud be damaging your ears?

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A decent pair of headphones can be a lifesaver in lockdown. They can block out the external sounds of noisy flatmates or children, so you can really focus on your Zoom meeting. Or, they can serve as a vital focus tool, to help you knuckle down to a looming work deadline.

But if they're not used correctly, experts warn that both over-ear and earbud varieties can damage your hearing, particularly if you use them for too long, or play music too loudly. Recently, Apple launched a new safety feature that causes the volume for iPhone or AirPods headphones to drop automatically after it hits over 90 decibels for more than four hours a week, to help keep users' ears safe.

But if you're monitoring your own use, how can you protect your ears and avoid unnecessary damage? We asked experts to give us the lowdown.

What's the risk of loud headphones?

"A healthy ear has some in-built protective mechanisms to prevent loud sounds from causing harm," explains Joseph Manjaly, consultant ear and hearing surgeon at Onewelbeck (onewelbeck.com).

"However, we know that extended hours of loud noise exposure and very loud sudden sounds can both cause irreversible inner ear damage, leading to hearing loss and tinnitus.

“It’s important to limit the number of hours per day you’re using loud volume headphones, and you should also avoid falling asleep with headphones playing music.”

Are in-ear headphones a bigger health risk than over-ear ones?

“No, what’s important is the overall volume of sound being played into the ears,” says Joseph. “The World Health Organization recommends a total of 40 hours of weekly exposure to volume levels no higher than 80 db for adults, and 75 db for children, on personal listening devices.”

Do we need to rest our ears from using headphones?

“It really depends on the volume level and how long you are listening for,” explains consultant audiologist Wayne Ellis. “The daily recommended safe volume level of any sound is below 85 decibels, for a maximum duration of eight hours. That’s equivalent to listening to a food blender for eight hours. “Normal conversation is typically 60–70 db, and you can listen safely at that level for as long as you like. It’s worth taking breaks of at least five minutes every hour, to be on the safe side, and give your ears a rest. Also, using a volume limiter on your device means you won’t be able to turn the music up without realising it.”

How else can we protect our ears and hearing?

“If you’re listening through earphones often, it’s worth investing in a pair of custom-fitted and noise-cancelling earphones,” suggests Joseph. “These will allow you to listen at lower volumes than otherwise needed. It’s also advisable to wear ear protection in loud environments.

“If you experience any hearing loss or tinnitus, seek help from a hearing healthcare professional.”

Patrick D’haese, audiologist at Med-el (medel.com) adds: “It’s concerning that despite being accustomed to regular health checks, we fail to take care of our hearing.

“You wouldn’t go years without visiting a dentist or optician, yet many adults have never had a hearing test.

“I urge anyone who hasn’t to make an appointment, visit your GP or an audiologist and make this a part of your health check-up routine.”

WITH jaw-dropping assets on offer, from gold mines or jewels, to helicopters or houseboats this is an eye-opening insight into the world of pawnbroking.

Often dubbed the oldest form of banking, this industry can be highly lucrative and fast-moving.

This three-parter visits pawnbrokers across the country, meeting the people doing the deals and also those wishing to sell.

Everyone involved wants to make as much money as possible, but as London pawnbroker Ray says: “It’s all about finding the sweet spot.”

After a tough year, there are some poor wealthy individuals who might need to sell a supercar or two to make ends meet.

MILLION POUND PAWN ITV, 8pm

“When people are asset rich and cash poor, pawnbroking is a life line,” explains Ray.

His first customer of the day is 26-year-old Hayes, who runs a concierge service for high net worth individuals, booking everything from the nannies or cleaner to restaurant tables and even holidays.

Hayes wants to sell a top of the range Lamborghini, which cost £222,000.

Ray is going to get it valued at a supercar garage. Meanwhile, in Cheshire, broker Kathy meets Dene, ex singer from Black Lace, who wants £4,000 for his prized Rolex watch. While over in Sheffield, kingpin broker Dan meets Fran, inset left,, who is hoping for cash from family heirlooms to fund medical treatment for her son.

“We all need pawnbrokers,” says Fran, “But I wouldn’t trust ‘em as far as I could throw ‘em.” The stakes are high – and the characters great fun – in this mind-boggling world of big bucks and fast deals.