Dear Alice,

I went to a club one night and the music was really loud. I've been going to clubs for a while now and the loud music usually makes my ears ring, but the ringing usually disappears in the morning. Well, this time, the ringing has lasted for several days. Is this a problem I should be worried about?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Good vibes, good music?but oh, that annoying ringing sound?we hear ya. That ringing you're hearing may be a case of tinnitus, which affects one or both ears. The sound may come and go or it may be continuous. Caused by a variety of factors, tinnitus may sometimes be a sign of hearing loss. It's no wonder that tinnitus is also referred to as "the club disease." Repeated exposure to loud noises, such as noisy clubs, typically over a long period of time may lead to permanent hearing loss and tinnitus. Given the fact that the ringing in your ears has lasted for several days, it may be a good idea to see an ear specialist, who may be able to tell you what may be causing the ringing in your ears and provide options for treatment.

About one in five people experience tinnitus, which may be caused by everything from allergies, to certain medications, to wax buildup in the ears. The leading cause of tinnitus, however, is exposure to loud noise. While an ear specialist can diagnose what may be going on, here are some general tips to deal with tinnitus:

- Avoid exposure to loud sounds and noises.
- Wear hearing protectors (i.e., ear muffs and ear plugs when exposure to loud sounds is unavoidable).
- Avoid smoking and/or caffeine.
- Improve circulation by exercising daily, limiting salt intake, and making sure your blood pressure is neither too high nor too low.
- Avoid fatigue by making sure you get enough sleep at night.
- Stress less by doing activities that relax you.
- Try to ignore the ringing sound as much as you can (using a fan or white noise machine may help mask the sound).
List adapted from [Tinnitus][2] from the American Academy of Otolaryngology.

Tinnitus most often occurs alongside hearing loss. Although one night of loud music may not result in immediate effects, it may be a sign that some damage has occurred to the nerve endings in the inner ear. When we "hear" a sound, the small bones in the middle ear transfer the sound vibrations to the inner ear. Once these vibrations move to the inner ear, they become translated into nerve impulses by the nerve endings of the hearing nerve. These impulses travel to the brain, which "figures out" what that sound is. Hearing loss, and possibly tinnitus, occurs when loud sounds and noises, typically more than 85 decibels (dB), kill these nerve endings. Once a nerve ending dies, a new one cannot grow back in its place; the damage is permanent. Hearing loss worsens as the number of nerves in the inner ear decrease.

Protecting your hearing doesn't necessarily mean staying out of the clubs forever. Earplugs and/or earmuffs can protect your ears against loud noises. Sure, it may not seem as cool to be wearing them when you're partying, but at the end of the night (or...er, morning) your ability to hear may be better as compared to your friends. If you have to shout over a noise even though you are at arm's length from someone, it probably means that the noise could damage your hearing. If you need to guesstimate how loud 85 dB sounds like, here are some hints: the noise from lawnmower or truck traffic can put you in at a good 90 dB, while a loud concert/car horn makes a resounding 115dB. Can you hear me now?

Discussing this matter with an ear specialist such as an otologist or otolaryngologist can help you with ideas about how to protect your ears and/or deal with the ringing. You may also want to visit the websites of the [American Tinnitus Association][3] and the [American Academy of Otolaryngology][4] for more resources.

Hear's to hearing the vibration,

Alice!

Category:
General Health[5]
Body Maintenance[6]
Environmental Health[7]

Related questions

Why, exactly, shouldn't I stick cotton swabs in my ears? [8]
Naive nose-blower[9]
Best ear protection when swimming?[10]
Can't process spoken speech ? which makes school difficult! [11]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)[12]
Medical Services (CUMC)[13]

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