

Managing your soundscapes at play

Part of the *Managing Your Soundscapes* series provided by Akoio

Managing Your Soundscapes at Play

In the fast-paced rhythm of daily life, finding time for play is crucial. Play allows us to step away from the demands of work and homelife and provides the opportunity to recharge, unwind, and connect. From the littlest children to the oldest seniors, engaging in play has numerous benefits for every body's overall well-being. Play promotes mental and emotional health. It can often foster connections with friends and family. Play can also cultivate a sense of joy and wonder.

The freedom to do something that we love just for the joy of it (i.e., “play”), nurtures a healthy sense of self. But in the excitement of engaging in enjoyable activities, we overlook the impact that our personal soundscapes have on our play experiences. This guide will help you learn how to optimize your sound environments (your soundscapes) for your well-being while “at play.”

Negative Soundscapes in Recreational Activities

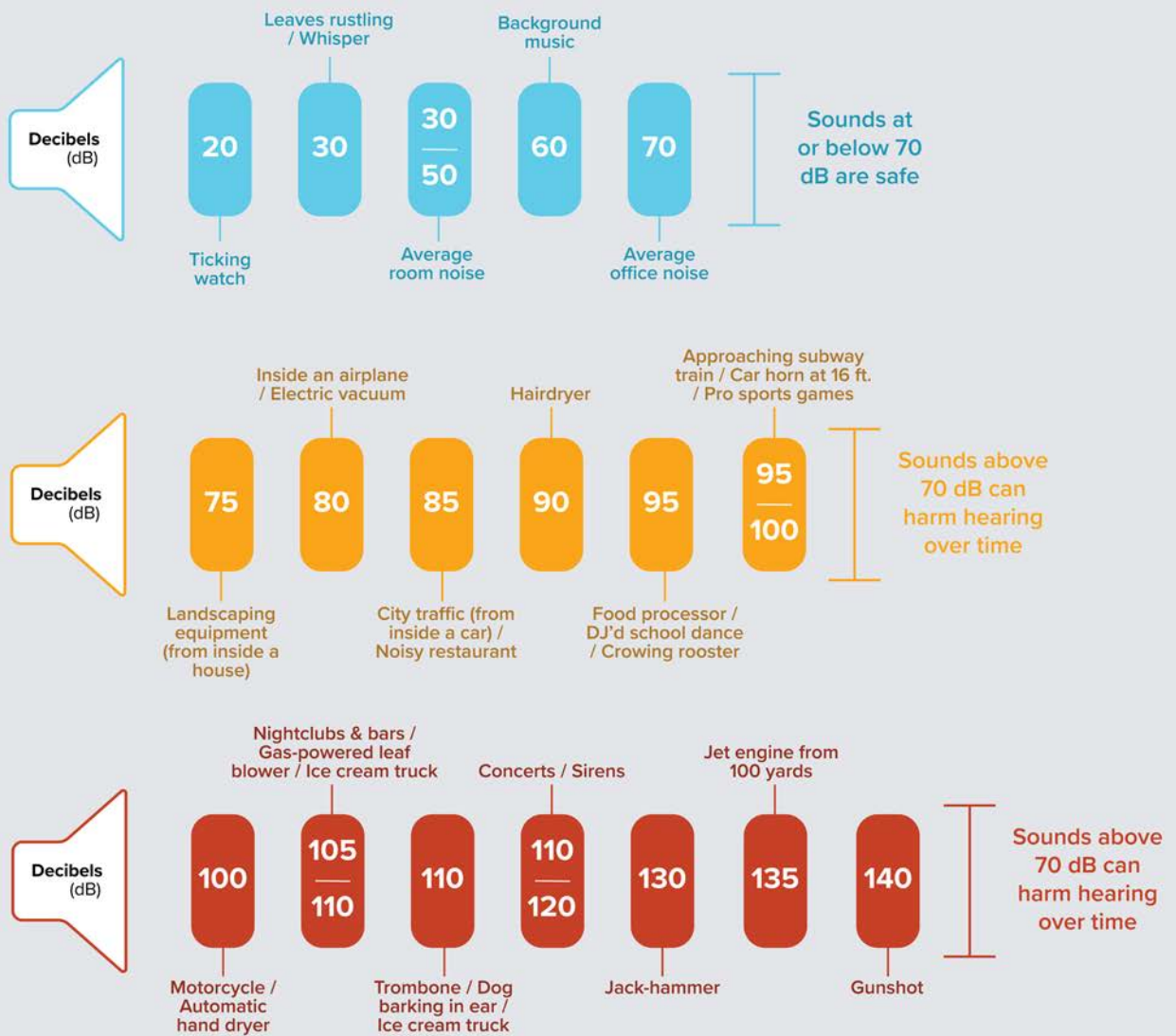
The first step in managing your play soundscape is to be aware of activities that can have adverse effects on your hearing health. Some activities are obvious culprits, such as attending motor sports events, loud concerts, or flying on airplanes. Other activities are sneakier sources of unwanted noise, like crowd noise at a ballgame or

music levels at the gym. But this doesn't mean you should give up your favorite activities just because they may be noisy. This guide will help you (and your ears) recognize potential playtime soundscape hazards, then take action to improve your recreational soundscapes and even enhance your play experience.

Studies show that [excessive noise levels in recreation](#) are common causes of noise-induced hearing loss, [tinnitus](#), and [hyperacusis](#) (noise sensitivity). Teens and young adults are especially at-risk since they often engage in loud, noisy activities (like listening to music at high volume and going to nightclubs). As they age, young adults [change their listening habits](#) to lower volumes. But even older folks risk their hearing health for some good playtime.

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Noise Levels



So, how do you know if your noise levels are excessive (and potentially harmful)? A good place to start is to measure the sound levels around you with a free app on your phone or smart watch.

These apps report noise levels in decibels (dB), a specific unit of measurement for sound. The higher the decibel number, the louder the sound is in your environment. For complete hearing safety, it is recommended that the noise around you remains at [70 decibels or lower](#). Anything above 70 dB for an extended amount of time (hours) can damage your hearing.

If you take a look at the graph above (data available at [Hearing Health Foundation](#)),

you'll notice many activities used for leisure and recreation (even blow drying your hair) are above 70 dB. Not to worry though, the good news is you can take measures to keep your hearing safe without sacrificing your fun.

How to Improve Recreation and Play with Positive Soundscapes

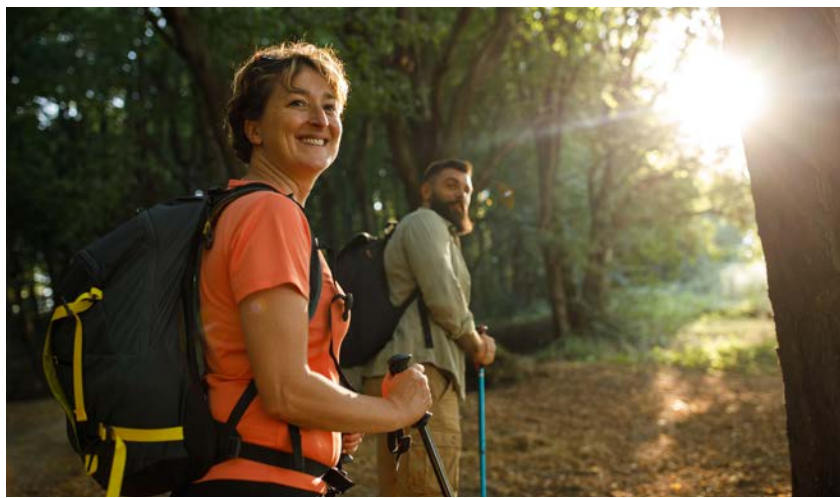
Protect your hearing. [Regular exposure](#) to sounds at or above 85 dB puts you at risk for permanent hearing loss. Many recreational activities, especially concerts and sports, are above 85 dB. Reaching 100 dB or louder can damage your hearing

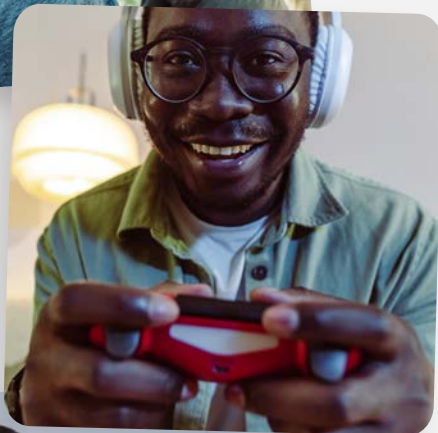
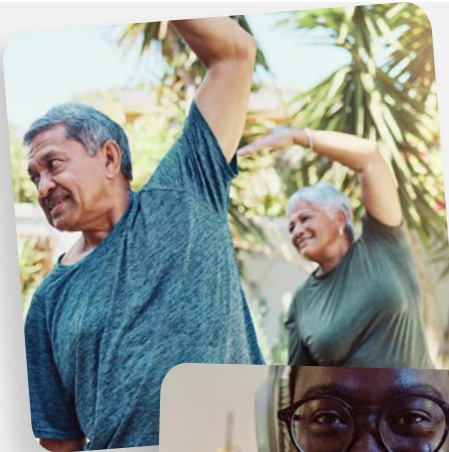
in just 15 minutes. If you plan to attend any loud event, inside or outside, pack your hearing protection! For example, these [Etymotic earplugs](#), can reduce the decibels entering your ears while still being able to hear the event around you (music, conversation, engine rumbles, etc). Pack a pair of earplugs in your bag, clip them to your keys, or stick them in your pocket. Your ears will thank you!

Use nature to your advantage. Some playtime activities naturally provide positive soundscapes. Nature hikes, for example, offer a serene environment that combines the soothing sounds of birds chirping, leaves rustling, or water flowing. Hiking is usually easy on the ears while also providing a [therapeutic experience for both the body and mind](#). Engaging in activities like gardening or spending time in your backyard surrounded by wind chimes can create a calming soundscape that enhances relaxation and mindfulness. Exploring quieter hobbies such as reading, painting, or playing a musical instrument can also provide a more serene and enjoyable auditory environment.

Add sounds or music. Positive soundscapes aren't just the absence of sound or noise. We can enhance our play activities by adding sounds, too. For instance, [listening to music while swimming](#) can elevate the experience by synchronizing the rhythmic movements with the melodies. Music can promote a sense of focus, making swimming a more immersive and rewarding activity. You can use special headphones, like these [Shokz Bone Conduction Waterproof Headphones](#), designed to be waterproof and provide a stellar listening experience while underwater!

Similarly, many folks that practice yoga use ambient sounds to enhance concentration and facilitate a deeper connection with the present moment. Exploring [sound therapy techniques](#), such as white noise or guided meditation, can further enhance relaxation





Focus on the right sounds. Some activities, such as gaming, are better enjoyed when you can hear only one thing: the game! [Gaming headsets help focus in-game audio](#), making it easier to concentrate on the current quest.

Headsets with active noise cancellation (ANC) can block out other surrounding noise (like the computer fan or your buddy watching television). Noise-cancellation can help increase the enjoyment of your video game time and improve your body's relaxation while you are at play.

Other hobbies also require extra focus on the sound, like recording and mixing music, creating podcasts, and listening to audiobooks. [This LucidSound headset](#) can help you better manage your at-play soundscapes when engaged in creating podcasts, music, or other audio projects.

Managing Playtime Soundscapes for Children and Teens

[Play is especially important for infants, toddlers, children, and teens](#), so it's critical we take interest in their playtime noise.

Infants and toddlers are particularly vulnerable to loud noises, which can have a significant impact on their developing auditory system. Providing them with a quiet and calm environment is helpful for their well-being. Use soundproofing techniques in nurseries and ensure their exposure to loud sounds is limited to help protect their hearing. These [HearMuffs](#) will help protect your little one from overly loud noises during family events or activities with louder noises.


For young children, create positive soundscapes by introducing them to a variety of musical genres, [engaging in interactive sound play](#), and encouraging them to express themselves through music and dance. You can also use free sound level apps on your phone or smart watch to

measure noise levels in the playroom or the park, and take steps to manage the sounds or protect your child's hearing as needed.

Preteens and teenagers often face challenges related to excessive noise exposure through activities like gaming, listening to loud music, and using the highest volume setting on their headphones. Educating them about the importance of safe listening practices, such as using volume-limiting headphones and taking regular breaks, can contribute to their long-term hearing health. The National Institute of Health's [Noisy Planet](#) website provides free resources and content for parents and families about hearing protection. (Check out their [multimedia library](#) for fun infographics and videos.)

Conclusion

Managing our personal soundscapes while we play is important for our well-being

and maximizes the benefits of recreational activity. By being aware of activities that have negative impacts on hearing health, we can take measures to protect ourselves and our families. We can participate in play activities with positive soundscapes, such as nature hikes or engaging in calming hobbies like reading. We can introduce positive sounds and music to our play in ways that improve our physical and cognitive health and deepen our connection with ourselves and our surroundings. We can embrace the power of play by optimizing our soundscapes and creating a harmonious balance between the joys of recreation and our overall health and well-being. Through the management of our personal soundscapes, we can ensure that play remains a source of joy, growth, and rejuvenation for every age, and at every stage of life. 

This article was developed by Akoio staff with research and other content contributed by Dr. Keena Seward, AuD, CCC-A/SLP

Family Soundscape Tip:

Encouraging open and honest conversations about the effects of noise and the benefits of managing our personal soundscapes can foster healthier habits and awareness among all age groups. You might consider a family night where you use sound level apps on your phone to measure the noise levels of everyone's favorite activities, then discuss things you can do for better soundscape management at home and at play.

