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## Budding deafness rocks the iPod set

Dewi Cooke  
January 9, 2008

THEIR white earphones have become a symbol of a generation but iPod and other MP3 players are raising fears of hearing loss in young people.

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A number of studies have pointed to MP3 players and "earbud" earphones as harming people's hearing. Now French researchers have found that one in five adolescents have hearing problems from exposure to loud music through such players or from music clubs and rock concerts.

Professor Christian Huggonet has told France's *Le Figaro* newspaper that 10 to 20% of adolescents surveyed had poor hearing.

He also said the use of "compressed" sound in modern media — in which weak signals are boosted to the level of stronger ones — is changing the way people speak.

"Once the ear has got accustomed to this kind of sound, it finds it very hard to return to sounds of weak intensity," Professor Huggonet said.

"Young children used to watching cartoons with compressed sound can end up speaking in the same loud, monotone way."

Audiologist Rebecca Verhoef from the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital said more research into the effects of compressed sound on speech was needed before drawing such a conclusion. But she acknowledged that the hospital had seen an anecdotal increase in young people presenting with hearing problems such as tinnitus, a ringing sensation in the ears.

Associate Professor Bob Cowan from the HEARing Co-operative Research Centre in Australia said devices such as mobile phone headsets and stereo headphones could be contributing to hearing problems in young people.

Professor Cowan stressed that exposure to loud noise of any kind needed to be moderated.

"I don't think the right message to use is the wowser one. Let's be sensible about it," he said

Acceptable industrial standards of noise exposure are 85 decibels over eight hours. Anything over this is considered unsafe.

Most people talked at a level of about 70 decibels, Ms Verhoef said.

With TELEGRAPH

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/01/08/1199554654519.html>