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Subject: A note for people with hearing damage

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 04 Aug 2012 16:14:36 GMT

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Sometimes, I get an email or forum post about what to do to make sound better, and the way it is worded makes me wonder if the writer has tinnitus or some other hearing problem. My reply usually ignores the possibility of hearing damage and addresses only sound quality and the things that will improve it.

But it does occur to me that maybe I should make mention of the fact that if you think you might have hearing damage, visit your doctor and protect your ears! If your ears hurt when listening or afterwards, refrain from turning the volume up and get the advice of a doctor.

For the person with potential hearing loss, intelligibility is probably more important than sound quality. Do whatever you need to do to make dialog understandable, even if that means sacrificing tonal balance or even overall sound quality. You may want to turn up the midrange and turn down the bass and treble.

If you have a home theater with a center channel speaker, you might turn it up louder than the L/R mains and surrounds. If you don't have a center channel, you might want to switch to stereo mode and forgo the surround sound entirely. The stereo mix of many movies puts more dialog content in the L/R channels than phantom center mode does.

Temporary tinnitus is normal after loud sounds, even for people with perfect hearing. However, it does indicate your hearing is being damaged, so refrain from things that cause it. After a period of time around loud sounds, it is normal for people to experience a persistent ringing sound and sometimes mild pain. This is temporary tinnitus, and it usually goes away after several minutes.

Examples of things that cause temporary tinnitus are loud concerts, motorcycle rides without a helmet, highway travel in a convertible car with the top down, using loud power machinery or loud exhaust like at a race track, gunshots and other explosions, etc. All these things cause temporary tinnitus in most people.

However, if you get this same ringing sensation after listening to sounds at moderate volume levels - if you seem more sensitive to sound level than others - then you may have a hearing problem and you should visit the doctor and seek their advice. Until then, keep the volume level down.