



**Volume control**  
Downsize your  
decibels whenever  
you wear  
headphones.

## Now hear this!

Everything you need to know about taking care of your ears **By Caroline Tiger**

**I**f your ears could speak, there's a good chance they'd say something like this: "Would you *please* turn it down?!" It doesn't take much to damage their delicate hair cells, which convert sound vibrations into nerve impulses. In fact, plenty of everyday noises can traumatize the cells to the point that they stop working altogether, says Ravi N. Samy, professor of otology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. And there are more than 11 million people under age 65 who have noise-induced hearing loss to prove it. You only have two ears, so follow the advice here to keep your hearing

sharp. (And by the way, drop the cotton swabs. They can scar the eardrum and contribute to hearing loss as well.)

**Get smart about headphones.** Ask any ear specialist about the best way to use a headset, and he'll probably tell you not to wear one at all. While that's perhaps the safest route, it's also unrealistic. *SELF's* compromise? Turn down the volume. If you can't hear someone talking to you over the music, your tunes are too loud. (FYI: Shouting doesn't count as talking.)

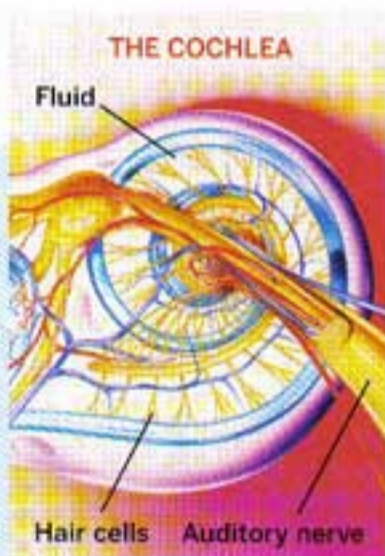
**Be a gym activist.** If the music in your class is so loud your instructor is shouting and you can barely hear her, ask her

to lower the volume. If you don't want to make trouble, or she won't do it, pop in a pair of foam earplugs. You'll still hear the beat and can watch to follow along. After class, share your concerns with a manager.

**Don't ignore your loved ones.** Sometimes the first signs that you have hearing loss come from people who are annoyed at you for constantly asking them to repeat what they just said. If your partner is forever requesting that you turn down the TV or complains that you don't pay attention when he's talking, consider getting your hearing checked. And do this especially if hearing loss runs in your family—a sign you may be more susceptible. You can find an audiologist at [Audiology.org](http://Audiology.org), or take the quiz at [www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/10ways.asp](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/10ways.asp) for a quick assessment. Although some loss can't be reversed, you can help protect yourself by wearing earplugs while doing noisy activities (like mowing the lawn) and grooving to your favorite tunes at a moderate (not rock-concert) level.

### Hearing loss 101

Loud noises create such pressure in the cochlea (the ear's hearing center) that its fluid rushes through the coils like a tidal wave, damaging hair cells irreparably, says Richard Gans, Ph.D., of the American Academy of Audiology in Reston, Virginia.



## Do you speak M.D.?

**Hematoma...hamartoma... hemangioma.** For too long, doctors' lingo has kept us in the dark. But if you get hip to the new health buzzwords below, you'll be on your way to speaking fluent medicalese.

**Verbacaine** A reassuring comment a doctor makes to a patient to help reduce her level of anxiety and discomfort, such as "you'll feel better in a minute." "I'd never seen a patient so nervous about stitches, but once I administered a healthy dose of verbacaine, she calmed right down."

**Diabesity** A term trademarked by the nonprofit health organization Shape Up America! in Washington, D.C., to describe diabetes triggered by excessive weight. "With a body-mass index of 35 and obvious signs of insulin resistance, this patient is clearly headed for diabesity."

**Narrative medicine** A doctor's practice of writing down every relevant nonsymptom comment to improve her understanding of the patient's illness, for a better diagnosis. "The doctor was so dedicated to narrative medicine that her patient files were all at least 3 inches thick."

—Holly C. Corbett



## The latest in condoms

You know why you have to use them—and you do. But that doesn't mean you *like* the rubber things. Some new kids on the block want to change that attitude, so SELF asked a few staff members to put them to the test. (Tough work, we admit, but someone had to do it!) —Rachel Clayton

SELF TESTED!

THE CONDOM	THE CLAIM	THE BED TEST	GRADE
	<b>Lifestyles Warming Pleasure</b> This condom's lube heats up on contact. Its thinner rubber is said to further enhance pleasure.	The warming sensation felt natural, not chemical, but some testers worried that the condom was too thin to offer maximum protection.	<b>B+</b>
	<b>Durex Tingling Pleasure</b> This spearmint-scented condom contains a menthol-spiked lubricant for an extra sexy tingle.	"It felt like the condom was coated in Altoids, and the tingling wasn't enjoyable," one tester noted. "The green color made my boyfriend look like an alien!"	<b>C-</b>
	<b>Durex Mutual Pleasure</b> For you, the condom's texture stimulates, while the curvier shape makes it more comfortable for him.	A tester felt the contouring along the edge made a noticeable difference, and all gave it a thumbs-up. "This actually added to the fun," one happy customer said.	<b>A</b>
	<b>Trojan Twisted Pleasure</b> This one features a swirled tip intended to stimulate your most sensitive areas.	One woman thought the texture was stimulating, but another said the condom was a bit stiff, so she and her partner ended their party early.	<b>B</b>