



# Prevention beats cure with hearing

AUSTRALIANS will hopefully treat warnings about noise induced hearing loss more seriously after a new study revealed that less than one in three Caboolture residents always wears hearing protection in noisy environments, for example when mowing the lawn or in an industrial situation.

Of even more concern, the HEARINGLifestyle study which interviewed 2738 Australian adults overall found that 16% never wear hearing protection, no matter what decibel level they're exposed to.

Not too surprisingly, hearing loss among Australian men is more prevalent than for women. Certainly during the working lifetime of Australia's seniors and baby boomers the industrial workforce was still male-dominated, and in most cases still is today.

An earlier comprehensive study in 2005 found that 59.9% of those with hearing loss were males, and 40.1% were females.

HEARINGLife's latest survey also revealed that the type of music we prefer affects how careful we are about our hearing.

Ten percent more classical music enthusiasts than rock 'n'

roll fans are using hearing protection in dangerously loud situations, an ironic statistic as rock music fans are exposed to significantly louder volumes at live concerts than their counterparts experience at symphonies and recitals.

Despite the apparent lack of care that so many afford their ears, the majority of respondents cited hearing loss as a health issue of major concern, second only to deteriorating eyesight.

"Although hearing loss can be treated – and in fact there have been amazing advances in our digital hearing aid technology in recent years – avoiding hearing loss in the first place is preferable," Audiologist Raji Parangad from HEARINGLife Caboolture said.

"Damage to your hearing is cumulative. The more loud concerts you attend, the more times you mow your lawn or use a chainsaw without ear protection – the worse the hearing loss will become. As little as 30 minutes' exposure to noise above 80 decibels can cause permanent damage."

In addition to prolonged or permanent hearing loss, exposure to excessive noise may cause dizzi-

ness, high blood pressure and even insomnia.

"Signs that you may have a hearing loss include often feeling like people are mumbling rather than speaking clearly, experiencing difficulty following conversations and having other people complain that you have the TV or radio turned up too loud." The good news is that modern digital hearing aids such as the ION series – the smallest open ear hearing aids available – are virtually invisible and extremely lightweight. These hearing aids are renowned for providing a natural sound quality that was previously unheard.

Small, discreet hearing aids are also helping to reduce the stigma associated with hearing loss, although there is still a long way to go. On average, Australian men and women take up to seven years to address their hearing loss, due in part to their outdated impressions about bulky, ineffective analogue aids that are no longer in use.

"If you think you might have a hearing loss, we can help. HEARINGLife offers free hearing tests and free home trials of the latest digital hearing aids and it's completely obligation free."