

Health Issues Surrounding Noise

A recent German study has uncovered that noise is a new threat to people who are predisposed to cardiovascular disease. The study involved about 2000 people who were hospitalized with a heart attack and an equal number hospitalized for other reasons. The study found that heart attack victims had experienced a far greater “noise burden” at work or home than those in the comparison group. The study which was led by Dr. Stefan Willich concluded that those who have a higher and longer exposure to noise are at higher risk for a heart attack.

Contributing noise sources were environmental noise as well as workplace noise. With environmental noise such as heavy traffic, machinery like lawn mowers, yelling kids and barking dogs, the study showed that men with sustained exposure had a 50 per cent higher risk of heart attack, while women had a risk three times higher than their counterparts not regularly blasted with loud noise. But when it came to workplace noise, men’s risk for heart attack went up by nearly one third while women didn’t seem affected at all.

The study suggests that in Germany the threshold of sound at which ear protection is mandatory should be lowered from 85 dBA to 70 or 80 dBA, although even those lower levels boosted the risk of heart attack among some of the study subjects.

Conclusion: It is not enough to provide hearing protection that only reduces the noise level to 85 dBA. The optimum protector should try to reduce the ambient noise to a range of 70 to 80 dBA

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