

NEW HEALTH THREAT:

NOISE POLLUTION

We've been worrying about toxins in our air and water for years, but consensus is now growing in the scientific community about the hazards of too much noise.

Here's what you need to know

WHAT IS NOISE POLLUTION?

The EPA defines noise pollution as any unwanted or disturbing sound that reduces your quality of life or disrupts daily activities. Traffic, barking dogs and loud music all qualify, but it's how noise impacts us that really matters. We are surrounded by sounds. Most aren't harmful, and many we just tune out, but noise can affect our health. A 2014 report published by the National Institutes of Health revealed that tens of millions of Americans suffer from health issues—heart disease, disturbed sleep, increased blood pressure, hearing loss and more—because of noise exposure. "Noise is an invisible pollutant that affects our breathing, brain waves and well-being, while silence replenishes and calms," says Poppy Szkiler, founder and managing director of Quiet Mark, a UK-based global noise-reduction product testing and awards program with which GH works to evaluate the sound levels of the products we test.



HOW TO

Silence the Danger

These simple steps can help lower your exposure to annoying and harmful noises—and get you more in tune with the good sounds around you

1 BOOST INSULATION IN YOUR HOME.

Consider replacing ill-fitting doors and windows with quieter ones, like those from Pella's new Lifestyle Series, which have sound-control glass to better block outdoor noises. Soft furnishings like carpets and draperies help muffle sound too.

2 LOOK FOR "QUIET" PRODUCTS.

More products are designed to be quiet these days. Spec sheets and websites for some dishwashers even include decibel-level claims. We're testing quieter hairdryers, blenders, vacuums and more, so keep an eye out for Quiet Mark's three-star ratings in upcoming GH reports.

3 TRACK SOUND WITH AN APP.

Some smartphone apps, like the one from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, give the decibel levels of sounds so you'll have an idea of what you're being exposed to. Be sure to calibrate the app before using it to improve the accuracy of the reading.

Noise by the Numbers

Decibels (dB) measure sound intensity—the more intense the sound, the higher the decibel count. Long exposure at 85 dB is dangerous; at 120 dB, even short exposure can do damage. How some sounds score:

 **30 dB**
Nearby whispering

 **40 dB**
Refrigerator humming

 **60 dB**
Air conditioner

 **80 dB to 85 dB**
Lawn mower

 **100 dB**
Approaching subway train

 **120 dB**
Ambulance siren