

▲ BONUS ▲
CANCER SUPPORT
GUIDE

MAY 05

Prevention®

Get a summer BODY

in 10 minutes a day

**7 MUST-HAVE
NUTRIENTS**
you're not getting

**Easiest way to
CUT 800
CALORIES**

**Whole grain
shortcuts**





researchers gave all the volunteers unlimited access to snacks, including potato chips, cheese, and chocolate. The result? Women (but not men, wouldn't you know) who were frustrated by the racket ate twice as many snacks as those who weren't bothered.

In addition to being downright irritating, noise, it seems, can drive the susceptible among us to overeat. And that's not the only way it can wear on your health. Noise can also raise levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that can, among other things, boost blood pressure, explains Robert T. Sataloff, MD, chair of the otolaryngology department at Graduate Hospital and professor at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. A recent study in the journal *Noise Health* found that noise can boost cortisol production even when you're sleeping.

Too much noise at night can, of course,

Noise-Proof Your House

Lower the volume, boost your health

BY SANDRA GORDON

Try toiling over a series of timed math problems while being bombarded by static at jackhammer volume.

Volunteers in a stress experiment at Pennsylvania State University did just that, while in another room a group did the problems in silence. Afterward, the

the otolaryngology department at Graduate Hospital and professor at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. A recent study in the journal *Noise Health* found that noise can boost cortisol production even when you're sleeping.

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keep you from getting the rest you need. And when you're sleep deprived, you're less adept at learning, thinking, and driving your car safely, notes Thomas Goehl, PhD, editor in chief of *Environmental Health Perspectives*.

Though it's not news that excessive noise can damage your hearing, you might be surprised to learn how quickly it can happen. Just 15 minutes of exposure to sound reaching 90 decibels—the range of some leaf blowers, lawn mowers, and motorcycles—can irreversibly injure the sound-transmitting cells in your ears. The louder the sound, the less time it takes to do damage, says Sataloff.

There's not much you can do about the street sweeper that creeps past your house. But you can limit the noise that filters into your home, and lower the decibels you and your family generate yourselves. Here's your strategy.

■ **Run noisy appliances at different times** If prime dishwasher time is after dinner, for example, consider giving the air con-

ditioner a break. There's no danger to your hearing if the two sound off simultaneously, says Sataloff. But the combined din can be annoying.

■ **Choose quieter appliances** You can find truly meek small appliances, including

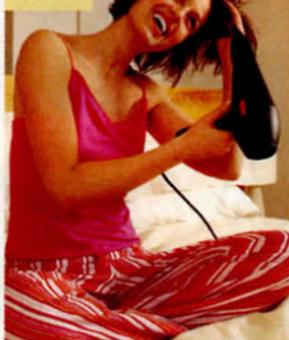
hair dryers, vacuums, and even coffee grinders. More efficient motors and fans make some hum so softly that you can have a conversation while using them. Manufacturers include Conair, Capresso, and Bosch. The easy-on-the-ears models aren't necessarily pricier: Conair's standard 1875-watt hair dryer retails for \$16; its quiet 1875-watt Speed

Drying System for \$18.

■ **Roll out the rugs and curtains** Area rugs, carpeting, and draperies all absorb noise. The thicker, the better. If you don't mind a slightly stuccoed look on your walls and ceilings, textured Acousti-Coat latex paint (about \$32 a gallon) will absorb sound, too.

■ **Seal gaps** To keep your kid's garage band from drowning out *Desperate Housewives*, put adhesive-backed weather stripping around interior and exterior doors and windows. "It only takes about 15 minutes and makes a big difference," says Andrea Ridout, the Dallas-based host of *Ask Andrea*, a nationally syndicated home-improvement radio show. Fairly inconspicuous, weather stripping

Make it
easy on
the ears



comes in brown, black, and white, so you can match it to your doors and door frames. Using plastic sealants such as Great Stuff to fill gaps around pipes and heating registers can further limit noise that travels from one room to the next.

■ **Hang a heftier door** Solid doors block more noise than hollow-core ones. They run \$200 and up. But you can save cash by replacing only select doors—say, the ones to your kids' rooms.

Your personal cone of silence

If you're using a power tool or lawn equipment and have to raise your voice to be heard by someone within arm's reach, you need ear protection, says noise expert Robert T. Sataloff, MD.

Protective earmuffs are generally a better bet than earplugs because they're bigger and absorb more sound, Sataloff says. To find a good pair, visit a store that carries ear protection (most hardware stores do). Try several, looking for ones that fit snugly. While wearing them, place your hands over the muffs and then remove your hands. The sound level shouldn't increase when your hands come off.

Noise-cancellation headphones are another option, albeit a pricier one (they retail for \$35 and up; muffs, for \$15 and up). The headphones "cancel" noise by producing a counteracting sound wave. They're good for noise that doesn't vary, such as the drone of the lawn mower, but not for variable noise, such as the ululating roar of a band saw.

Don't like the feel of muffs? Look for plugs that make a tight seal with your ear canal: If you tug them gently, they shouldn't come out.

■ **Replace or retrofit big appliances** There's also a growing selection of well-insulated, quieter large appliances out there, including washing machines, dryers, air conditioners, and dishwashers. Fedders, Whirlpool, KitchenAid, and Bosch offer several models. Some premium dishwashers are so unobtrusive you barely know they're running. But that hush comes at a hefty price: \$1,000 and up. For a low-cost upgrade, try insulating your dishwasher, Ridout suggests.

Simply remove the screws holding the unit in place, pull it out, wrap fiberglass insulation around the outside (the hidden part only, of course), then replace.

■ **Insulate when you build or renovate** For a formidable sound barrier, install blown-in or blanket—also called "batt"—insulation between wall studs and floor joists coupled with

a sheet of cellulose material (called Homasote) under the drywall and over the subflooring. This is a win-win approach: You'll not only shut out the sound from your neighbors' raucous lawn party, but your heating and cooling costs should drop dramatically.

The mother of two boisterous little girls, Sandra Gordon lives in Connecticut.



Using power tools? Wear these