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# Hyperacusis And Phobia Of Noise In Children

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## What is hyperacusis?

Children with hyperacusis have difficulty tolerating sounds which do not bother others, for example noise from the washing machine, vacuum cleaner, traffic noise or shuffling papers.

For some children they may only experience hyperacusis for some sounds, so that not all noises of the same volume will cause distress.

## Signs and symptoms

Children with hyperacusis often have normal or near normal hearing. They may cry, cover their ears, scream loudly or behave erratically when they hear a sound that they find hard to tolerate.

## Prevalence and possible causes:

The cause of hyperacusis is unknown and more research is needed. In most children, no specific cause can be identified and it is simply that it is learned behaviour. It has sometimes been triggered by exposure to a loud or unpleasant noise that takes them by surprise, for example, a firework or a balloon popping or shouting. This can lead to a fear or phobia of loud noise and can result in a child anticipating and wanting to avoid certain situations such as parties.

Other possible causes include: head injury, noise induced trauma, ear damage from toxins or medication or viral infections. It is known that hyperacusis is more common in children with certain conditions or syndromes, for example: William's syndrome, autism, attention deficit disorder, auditory processing disorder and in children with learning difficulties.

## Advice

It is important not to focus on hyperacusis with your child. The use of earplugs is generally not advised. Blocking your child's hearing with earplugs could mean they do not hear warning sounds and may mean that the ears try to compensate by amplifying the quieter sounds making the ears even more over sensitive.

Showing where the sound is coming from and explaining what it is and reassuring them may help them tolerate it.

Giving them control of when the sound occurs may help reduce your child's fear and anxiety. This may involve getting your child to turn the vacuum cleaner on and off for example, or encouraging the use of sound while playing.

This should help your child learn that sound is not something that they need to be afraid of and that sound can be fun.

Studies have shown that hyperacusis tends to be less of a problem after the age of 5-6 years and unlike many adults affected, most children will find that the problem improves /disappears over time. If your child is particularly anxious about sounds, we may suggest that our psychologist sees them to offer help with coping strategies and/or anxiety.

**A useful book for younger children :  
"When Fuzzy was afraid of big and loud things"  
by Inger Maier and Jennifer Candon**

## Misophonia

A similar but different condition is misophonia. Miso- (hatred) phonia (sound) means strong reactions to selective sounds. In misophonia, it is repeating (or patterned sounds) which are intolerable.

Individuals with misophonia are set off or "triggered" by very specific patterned sounds, such as chewing, coughing, pencil tapping, sneezing etc.

## Treatment of misophonia

Currently, there is no cure for misophonia. Your clinician can, however, discuss coping strategies. Even just to talk about your condition might be helpful.