

Loud Music Can Cause Lung Collapse



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By Amy Norton

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Blasting music can be hard on the ears and the neighbors, and now researchers say it can also pack enough punch to collapse a lung.

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Reporting in the medical journal *Thorax*, they describe the cases of four young men who suffered a lung collapse -- technically called pneumothorax -- that appeared to be triggered by loud music. Three of the men were at a concert or club when the pneumothorax occurred, while the fourth was in his car, which was outfitted with a 1,000-watt bass box because he "liked to listen to loud music."

A pneumothorax occurs when a small rupture in one of the lungs allows air to leak into the space between the lungs and the chest wall, causing the lung to collapse. Symptoms include breathlessness and chest pain on the affected side.

A small, partial collapse may resolve on its own, but more severe cases may require the insertion of a chest tube to allow the air to escape the chest cavity.

Often, an underlying lung disease or chest injury is the culprit in pneumothorax. But so-called primary spontaneous pneumothorax happens in the absence of an underlying disease, typically striking tall, thin, male smokers.

The cases described in the *Thorax* report suggest that loud music may be one cause of this type of pneumothorax. Though the report cites only a small number of patients, lead author Dr. Marc Noppen told Reuters Health he suspects more cases of music-induced pneumothorax will now be caught.

Since the report's publication, he said, doctors in a few countries have told him they've seen similar cases. If more doctors routinely ask pneumothorax patients about their exposure to loud music, the number of injuries attributed to blasting tunes will likely go up, noted Noppen, who is with the Academic Hospital in Brussels, Belgium.

In two of the cases his team describes, the men were standing close to large loudspeakers when they suddenly felt chest pain.

A third case involved a 23-year-old smoker who had suffered several episodes of pneumothorax. During a follow-up medical visit, the doctors mentioned having seen two music-related pneumothorax cases, and the patient suddenly remembered that two of his attacks happened at heavy metal concerts.

Noppen said he and his colleagues suspect that loud music may damage the lungs due to its booming bass frequency, which can be felt as a vibration going through the body. The lungs may essentially start to vibrate in the same frequency as the bass, which could cause a lung to rupture.

It's probably a good idea, according to Noppen, to stand back from the speakers at concerts and clubs and to ease up on that car-stereo bass. It might also save your hearing, he added.

SOURCE: *Thorax*, August 2004.

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