

BTA Plug'em campaign – teaching young people how to enjoy live music safely

BY EMILY BROOMHEAD

In today's world of ever-increasing sound levels, the Plug'em campaign, run by the British Tinnitus Association (BTA), is highlighting the issue of tinnitus caused by loud music in people aged 16-25 years old. The purpose of the campaign is to educate people about how to protect their hearing at clubs, gigs and festivals. Along with the campaign Ambassadors, they are encouraging those who love music to protect themselves and not let the thing they love damage their hearing for life. **Emily Broomhead**, BTA Projects Manager, tells us more.



www.plugem.co.uk

“Everyone loves music – it makes you feel great! Don't let your love of music ruin your love of music. If you go to clubs, gigs or festivals, take some earplugs with you, use them and protect yourself from tinnitus and hearing damage.”

What is Plug'em?

Plug'em is a tinnitus prevention campaign which is being run by the British Tinnitus Association (BTA), with the aim of raising awareness of the need to protect hearing at loud live music events. We are getting the message out that people shouldn't be embarrassed about wearing earplugs at gigs, festivals and clubs and we're highlighting, in simple terms, why it's so important to make sure people think about their hearing, preventing any damage that could potentially be easily avoided and encouraging young people to enjoy music safely.

Why is the campaign important?

Unfortunately, the majority of younger people don't learn about how to protect their hearing and don't understand that once damage is done, it can't be repaired. People go to gigs where music is played at increasingly loud volumes and come away with a ringing in the ears, which to them is the normal outcome after a night out. It lasts a few hours and is usually gone when they wake the next day. They continue to go out without worrying about their hearing and don't use earplugs – and gradually the damage is done. Sometimes, tinnitus occurs after one night out, and the noises don't cease, leaving people with damage which can't be reversed. Often, people who experience tinnitus are unable to enjoy music as much, due to the stress and anxiety they experience as a result of their tinnitus. They ask, “Why didn't I know about tinnitus? If I'd have known I would have done something about it!” Sadly, the vast majority of younger people have not heard of tinnitus and that's where the BTA and Plug'em are trying to make their mark; by raising awareness of what tinnitus is, how it's caused and how young

people can protect themselves at live music events.

We've gone for a largely social media-based campaign: Plug'em already has a strong following on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. With the backing of several high profile Ambassadors including Mark Ronson (Musician, DJ, and Music Producer) and Anne Savage (DJ, Producer and Presenter), we have been able to raise awareness of the fact that tinnitus can affect anyone. Their messages are to the point, stressing that using earplugs is far better than suffering a constant ringing, buzzing or screeching in the ears.

Anne Savage also recently helped us raise awareness by presenting a new BBC iWonder guide entitled, ‘How can I stop gigs and festivals ruining my hearing?’, which can be viewed online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/ztdgnbk>.

How we are reaching people

The Plug'em website provides information on safe listening levels and exposure times so that visitors can learn ‘how loud is loud’. It's difficult for someone to establish what is and isn't safe, so we have a graphic which details sound levels of various things such as the tube, a lawn mower and a live rock band – which, incidentally, is usually safe for only around 66 seconds without hearing protection. Our website also gives details about the different sorts of earplugs that are available so that people know what sort is most suitable for what purpose, be it at a club as a party-goer, or as a musician performing.

We are really pleased that we've been able to upload regular blogs and are keen to write for other sites and publications too. You can read all our current blogs at www.plugem.co.uk/blogs.



plug'em

“Plug'em is bringing attention to the fact we only have one set of ears we really need to be looking after them.

**Sonny Wharton [Skint Records]
Plug'em Ambassador**

“I've had tinnitus for over 10 years and it affects me 24/7.

I wish I had been smart enough to Plug'em earlier.

I make sure that I do it now though”

**Mark Ronson
Musician, DJ
Music Producer**

Plug'em Ambassador

P



Support for the campaign

Going from three original Ambassadors to over 20, we're hopeful we are getting to the right people. It's been great to see these Ambassadors sharing their personal hearing issues in order to help others understand the risks of damage from loud music. If you want to have a look at those who are supporting us already, the list can be found at www.plugem.co.uk/ambassadors.

Four simple tips:

We want to highlight to young people that in addition to using earplugs, there are other things you can do to reduce your risk of tinnitus from loud live music:

1. Use EARPLUGS. They don't block the

music out, in fact if you get the right ones you can hear everything better.

2. Don't stand by the SPEAKERS!
3. Make sure you DRINK SOME WATER.
4. Take some TIME OUT. Go to a chillout area, see what else is going on – it will give your ears a chance to relax.

Next steps

The one thing we've found people asking for, are details of where to buy earplugs. Simply saying 'high street hearing professionals' on our site is now not enough, so we have been working hard to produce a listing of 'where to buy' on the Plug'em site. This new directory is scheduled to launch in September, and we feel it will be a great addition to the site, which will have all the

necessary information for those wondering why and how to protect their hearing.

How you can help

If you would like to help us raise more awareness of the Plug'em website and our social media streams, please use the following details.

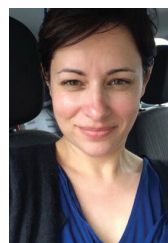
Share our tweets and messages and help us reach more people. You can find out what we are up to at:

- www.plugem.co.uk
- Twitter – @Plug_em
- Instagram – Plug_em
- Facebook – [fb.com/plugemuk](https://www.facebook.com/plugemuk)

If you would like more information about Plug'em please contact emily@tinnitus.org.uk.

SUMMARY

- Loud music can cause tinnitus. If you go anywhere where you are going to listen to loud music, be prepared and take some earplugs. They will help protect you from tinnitus.
- If you see a patient who is at risk of hearing damage, be it from loud music or exposure to loud sounds, please tell them about Plug'em and advise them on hearing protection.
- Take our simple four step advice to protect yourself from any damage that could potentially be caused.
- Spread the word and help us get our message to more people by sharing our social media streams @Plug_em and our website www.plugem.co.uk.
- Want any more information about the campaign or just want to help raise awareness? We have postcards, posters and flyers available – just get in touch.



Emily Broomhead,

BTA Projects Manager, British Tinnitus Association, Ground Floor, Unit 5, Acorn Business Park, Woodseats Close, Sheffield, S8 0TB, UK.

E: emily@tinnitus.org.uk

Twitter: @EBroomhead
www.tinnitus.org.uk

Declaration of Competing Interests: None declared.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Broomhead is Projects Manager for the British Tinnitus Association (BTA) and leads on the Plug'em campaign. Having worked for the BTA for over 15 years, she is passionate about not only supporting people who have tinnitus, but raising more awareness around prevention through Plug'em and Tinnitus Awareness Week, 6-12 February 2017.