- Noise / Stress



DRAGOS ASAFTEI / FILE404/SHUTTERSTOCK

Noise from fast cars increases stress levels

Researchers have looked at how traffic noise affects our mental health and wellbeing. It was a small study, but produced a useful tip for those who feel stressed by the noise of city life.

HEALTH Multiple studies have shown that people living in cities are more prone to developing anxiety, stress, and other mental disorders. And one of the factors that might be affecting our mental health is city noise.

Researchers from Bristol's University of the West of England set out to find out exactly how traffic noise affects our mental health, and what might be done to reduce its harmful effects.

They found that traffic noise does indeed breed anxiety, and also makes it more difficult to cope with stress.

The conclusions were based on a small study using 68 participants. Each subject was quizzed about their general mood before being exposed first to a one-minute 'stressor' video containing a written maths question which was obscured by flashing between different text and background colours, along with "stressful sounds". Once this question was answered by the participant, their current mood was again assessed before listening to one of the three audio files.

One audio file held sounds from nature in an English city, with bird song particularly prominent, while the others added recorded traffic noise from roads with speed limits of 20mph and 40mph.

After listening to their recordings, participants again answered questions about their mood, stress and anxiety levels. Finally after the experiment they were asked a series of demographic questions in order to gain an understanding of any participant bias.

The participants rated themselves as most stressed or anxious after listening to the recording using the higher-speed-limit road noise, while the lowest self-reported levels of stress and anxiety came with natural sounds.

The researchers conclude that lower speed limits in urban areas should be considered to support mental health.

"This supports previous findings which emphasise that natural sounds have a positive effect on stress recovery and mental fatigue," the researchers say.

They also advise people to get out and spend time in nature. Their results confirm the need for natural spaces within cities and especially areas that provide people a sound experience other than human-induced noise.

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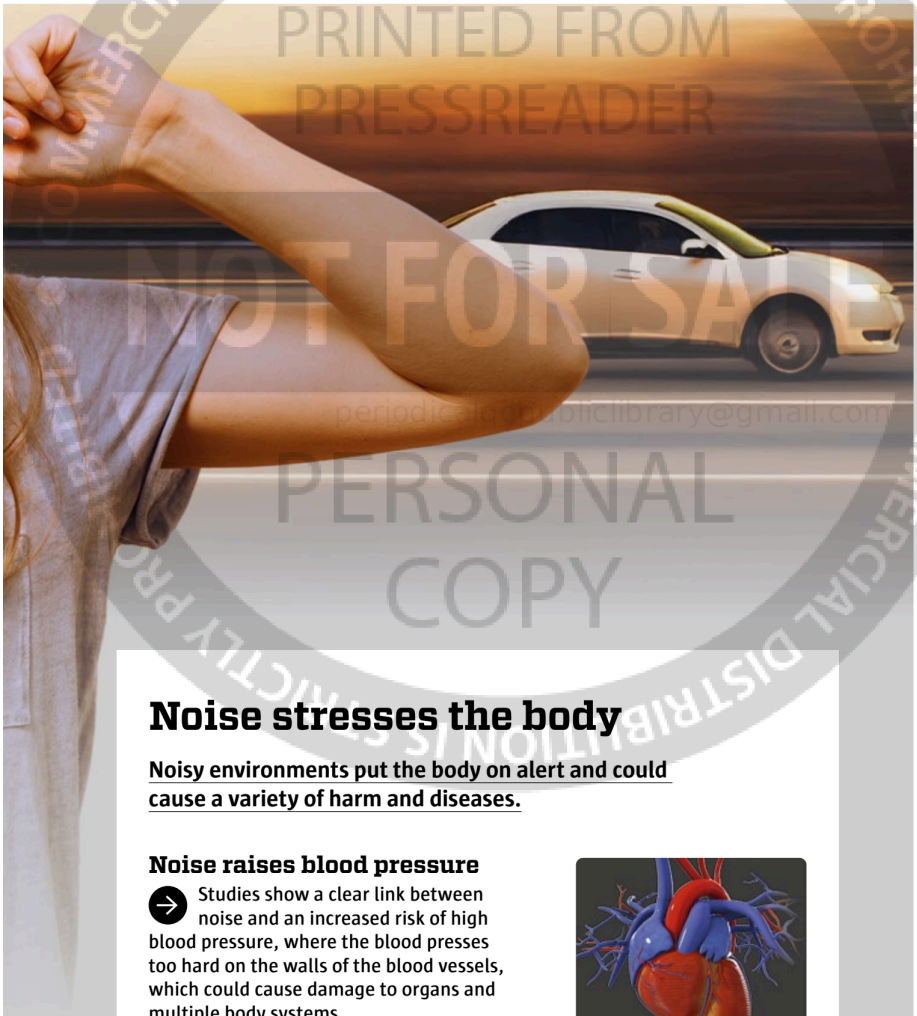

Noise stresses the body

Noisy environments put the body on alert and could cause a variety of harm and diseases.

Noise raises blood pressure

Studies show a clear link between noise and an increased risk of high blood pressure, where the blood presses too hard on the walls of the blood vessels, which could cause damage to organs and multiple body systems.

Loud noises increase cancer risk

Studies have shown links between noise and cancers such as breast and colon cancer. One possible explanation is that noise inhibits the brain's production of the sleep-regulating melatonin hormone in the body, which has cancer-inhibiting capacities.



Noise leads to dangerous fat

Noise can cause obesity due to its stressful effects on the body. Among other things, obesity is harmful because the body's share of internal fat located around the organs becomes too large. The fat secretes a neurotransmitter in the form of cytokines, which could lead to organ inflammation.



Dog-like animals existed before the dinosaurs

Well-preserved bone fragments have revealed a 270-million-year-old animal that is distantly related to mammals.

NATURE Mammals descend from a group of animals known as therapsids, which started to dominate life on Earth even before the era of the dinosaurs, a key evolutionary bridge between reptile-like synapsids and true mammals.

The discovery of the new dog-like animal from an extinct group of therapsids by the name of 'gorgonopsids', with sabre teeth, bears witness to the remarkable evolution of mammals. Gorgonopsids existed in the Permian period 270-250 million years ago, and have so far been found only in Russia and South Africa. But the new discovery was made on the Spanish island of Mallorca, showing that they also existed elsewhere.

Researchers from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago found bones including skull fragments, vertebrae and an almost complete femur, from which they were able to reconstruct the roughly 1-metre-long creature.

"It looked like a medium-sized dog, but with sabre teeth, no fur, and no ears," says co-author Ken Angielczyk of the Chicago Field Museum's MacArthur Curator of Paleomammalogy.

The researchers believe the newly-discovered animal was carnivorous and among the first to develop sabre teeth (long, curved canines), which likely placed it high in the food chain. The as-yet unnamed animal is not a direct ancestor of mammals, but belongs to a lineage that later evolved into mammals.

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