

Healthy concert-going: Be in the know to enjoy the show

By Teddi Nicolaus

Do you love live concerts? If so, you're not alone. Tens of millions of people attend concerts around the world every year. For many, there's an energy at concerts they just can't get from listening to music at home.

But before you head out to the show, take time to brush up on safety. That way the experience will leave you fulfilled and uplifted, not drained or, even worse, sick or injured. From cuts and scrapes to heat exhaustion and dehydration, concert mishaps happen all the time.

"For most of us, being part of a large audience at a concert is a fascinating and joyful experience," says crowd management expert Paul Wertheimer. "Whether this is your first concert experience or your 20th, you should make certain preparations before leaving home."

Some risky situations can develop when you're in a big crowd, says Wertheimer.

"The best technique for staying safe is to avoid risks," he says. "But that can be easier said than done when you're in a large crowd."

Still, there are lots of things you can do to increase your chances of having a pleasant experience, and most require only basic common sense.

◆ **Stay hydrated.** It's not uncommon at concerts to get so wrapped up in the music that you forget to drink water. Dehydration can lead to dizziness, rapid breathing and confusion and can land you in the emergency room. If the

venue allows it, wear a hydration backpack, which is handy at hot outdoor shows. Some brands come with extra pockets for items like pain relievers, bandages and hand sanitizers.

◆ **Limit alcohol intake.** Many concerts are held outdoors where you'll be spending a lot of time walking, dancing and sweating in the hot sun. Adding alcohol to the mix can lead to dehydration and heat exhaustion.

◆ **Decide on a meet-up spot.** Concerts can get crazy. If you're going with others, it's very possible you'll get separated during the show. Spend a few minutes beforehand picking a meeting spot.

◆ **Have an exit strategy.** It's important to know as many ways out

of a venue as possible in case you need to evacuate quickly.

"Convention tells you to take the closest exit, which isn't good advice if everybody is taking that exit," Wertheimer says.

◆ **Stay away from dangerous "mosh pits,"** where very physical and sometimes violent dancing takes place. As they are usually close to the stage, the areas offer prime viewing spots, but they've been associated with serious injuries and deaths.

◆ **Reconsider that front-row spot.** Even though it gives you a great view of the performers, being in the front row can put you at risk if something falls or splashes from the stage. And if there is a crowd surge, you could get pinned against a barrier with no easy way out.

If you do find yourself boxed in at a show, move with the crowd flow and not against it. Wertheimer suggests that you mimic a boxer by standing straight, feet apart, one foot in front of the other, knees slightly bent and with your arms and hands protecting your chest and head. That way you will be better able to stay upright and retain some use of your arms and hands.

◆ **Protect your hearing.**



>> For more tips on hearing protection, visit www.cdc.gov/nceh/hearing_loss

Enjoying live music is one of life's simple pleasures, especially if it's your favorite band. But listening to loud music without hearing protection can cause hearing loss and tinnitus.

Hearing loss tends to happen by degree, says Patricia Johnson, AuD, a doctor of audiology and associate professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine in Chapel Hill.

"Have you ever left a concert with your ears ringing or your hearing feeling a little muffled, like there's cotton in your ears? That's a warning sign that damage has already occurred," Johnson says. "With some rest, your ears will recover, and your hearing will probably come back. But if you keep doing it, that temporary shift in your hearing can become permanent."

Hearing safety at concerts means staying away from the speakers and wearing hearing protection. Foam earplugs from the drugstore work fine, but most people only get them halfway in their ears, "which means they are only getting half the protection," Johnson says.

A better option is to buy special earplugs designed for musicians. They reduce noise but still maintain the full spectrum of sound, which means you can still enjoy the music.

And remember: Hearing damage doesn't discriminate based on the type of music. Whether the musicians are playing jazz, hip hop, classical or country, you should be using hearing protection.

"Hearing protection is a lot cheaper than hearing aids, which run in the thousands of dollars, so you're investing in your future," Johnson says.



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