Readers of this journal often complain that many of the papers we publish have limited relevance to daily life. Not all contributions, they aver, relate directly to problems faced in the real world. I was more than a little excited, therefore, when the paper “Effects of Exercise and Noise on Auditory Thresholds and Distortion-Product Otoacoustic Emissions” came across my desk. Authors Shannon Hooks, Susan Geer, and Andrew Stuart, of East Carolina University, set out to replicate previous findings that noise exposure and exercise are synergistic; that is, if you are exercising while you are being exposed to loud noise, there will be a greater effect on auditory threshold sensitivity and on otoacoustic emission amplitudes than would be the case for noise alone.

Here, I thought, is an issue directly relevant to my own daily life. It is the case that every morning finds me hard at work in mind-numbing exercise on my stair-climbing machine while simultaneously monitoring the morning television shows from the various networks. Since the machine is fairly noisy in its own right, I must raise the sound level from the TV set to overcome it. Is it possible, I wondered, that this combination of exercise and noise is damaging my already frail hair cells to an extent greater than either effect alone? Am I sacrificing cell body and ciliary motility in the pursuit of an elusive weight-control goal? The implication was clear to me: exercise would have to go. I could probably even return the stair-stepper to the store for a refund. Naturally, I would miss it, but no price is too high to protect one’s auditory periphery. I thought that my wife would be pleased by my concern for the protection of sensory capacity, but as Virgil was so fond of pointing out, Varium et mutabile semper femina. She suggested that I turn off the TV sound and only watch the picture. Marshalling all of my resources of patience and equanimity, I turned to the Hooks, Geer, and Stuart paper for further support of my position. But, alas, dear reader, there was none. The anticipated synergy failed to appear. In 16 young adults, the combination of noise and exercise had no more effect on thresholds and otoacoustic emission amplitudes than the condition of noise alone, nor were there ear or gender differences. The authors conclude that, although further investigation is warranted, “there was no evidence of a synergistic combination of exercise and noise on auditory function…”

I will, I suppose, continue to exercise, although I have been promised a paper exploring the negative effect of exercise on auditory brainstem response latency.

James Jerger
Editor-in-Chief