

Will this new “noise pill” protect me from hearing loss?

One of the hot topics in the field of hearing research is the potential that drugs may protect the ear from noise-induced hearing loss. A [contemporary article](#) in the *Update* newsletter of the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC) discussed this issue at some length. A recent letter to *The Hearing Journal*, reproduced below, provides additional information and a warning.

The new pill formulation of N-acetylcysteine being sold by American Biohealth (*Hearing Journal* Report, January 2004) may or may not prove to be effective in human clinical trials for the prevention or rescue from acoustic trauma. Apparently, despite the lack of human efficacy data so far, it can be sold over the counter without FDA approval as a nutritional supplement, and adverse effects are rare. Thus, its use before and/or after exposure to loud noise would seem to be relatively safe, but only if (as described in your news report) it is used “in conjunction with, not instead of, external hearing protection.”

Unfortunately, when I visited the company web site (www.thehearingpill.com), I could find mention of hearing protection devices only in the “frequently asked questions” section. In contrast, in the “learn more about the hearing pill” section, visitors are told to take the pills for 2 days prior to, and 2 days after, entering a noisy environment, with no mention of earplugs or earmuffs. Consumers who visit this web site and fail to read all the “frequently asked questions” could certainly conclude that this was a product that makes hearing protection unnecessary.

Readers of *The Hearing Journal* should not recommend this product without making it very clear that hearing protection devices are still the primary defense against acoustic trauma when hunting, target shooting, or working in jobs with potentially hazardous noise exposure. I hope the company will improve the advice that is offered on its web site.

Robert A. Dobie, MD
University of California-Davis and
Dobie Associates

[Letter reprinted from the 2004 *The Hearing Journal* 57(4), p. 64, with permission of the author and of the Journal.]