The Human Ear

Terms and definitions

**anvil** (also called the incus) a tiny bone that passes vibrations from the hammer to the stirrup.

**cochlea** a spiral-shaped, fluid-filled, inner ear structure; it is lined with cilia (tiny hairs) that move when vibrated and cause a nerve impulse to form.

**ear canal** the tube through which sound travels to the ear drum.

**ear drum** (also called the tympanic membrane) a thin membrane that vibrates when sound waves reach it.

**Eustachian tube** a tube that connects the middle ear to the back of the nose; it equalizes the pressure between the middle ear and the air outside. When you “pop” your ears as you change altitude (going up a mountain or in an airplane), you are equalizing the air pressure in your middle ear.

**hammer** (also called the malleus) a tiny bone that passes vibrations from the eardrum to the anvil.

**nerves** these carry electro-chemical signals from the inner ear (the cochlea) to the brain.

**pinna** (also called the auricle) the external part of the ear that collects soundwaves.

**semicircular canals** three loops of fluid-filled tubes that are attached to the cochlea in the inner ear; they help us maintain our sense of balance.

**stirrup** (also called the stapes) a tiny, U-shaped bone that passes vibrations from the stirrup to the cochlea; this is the smallest bone in the human body (0.25 to 0.33 cm long).

Protect your ears. If the noise is too loud, walk away, turn it down (*Turn it to the Left*), or use ear plugs.