

tech support

Could your favorite gadget be harming your health? Marisa Meltzer reports.

SOUND DECISION LISTENING TO MUSIC TOO LOUDLY CAN DAMAGE THE INNER EAR. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROE ETHRIDGE.

a few months ago, Ashley, an eighteen-year-old from New Jersey, had a panic attack. She was waiting for the train to New York when she realized she'd left her BlackBerry charger at home.

"I freaked out. There was no way for me to get it and still make the train," she remembers. "I called my brother screaming and told him I would give him twenty dollars if he could bring it to me." Ashley's worst nightmare—that her BlackBerry would run out of power—almost came true.

According to *The Washington Post*, 2.51 million people have BlackBerries—more

than double the number from 2004. But the convenience offered by tech accessories can come with a price. "BlackBerry thumb," a repetitive stress injury caused by typing with the thumbs, where the area between the thumbs and wrists throbs from a swelling of the sheath around the thumb, is becoming a common ailment among habitual texters. "The physical intensity of instantly replying adds to injuries," says Wendy Young, a Bellaire, Texas-based ergonomics specialist. In Italy, a thirteen-year-old girl reportedly needed orthopedic treatment after typing at least 100 text-messages a day. And the safety issues are greater than just self-injury: In 2005, a seventeen- ➤