

Alliance ENT & Hearing Center

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TINNITUS



Is the ringing in my ears normal?

Not at all. Tinnitus is the name for these head noises, and they are very common. Nearly 36 million Americans suffer from this discomfort. Tinnitus may come and go, or you may be aware of a continuous sound. It can vary in pitch from a low roar to a high squeal or whine, and you may hear it in one or both ears. When the ringing is constant, it can be annoying and distracting. More than seven million people are afflicted so severely that they cannot lead normal lives.

Can other people hear the noise in my ears?

Not usually, but sometimes that are able to hear a certain type of tinnitus. This is called “objective tinnitus,” and it caused either by abnormalities in blood vessels around the outside of the ear or by muscle spasms, which may sound like clicks or crackling inside the middle ear.

What causes tinnitus?

Most tinnitus comes from damage to the microscopic endings of the hearing nerve in the inner ear. The health of these nerve endings is important for acute hearing, and injury to them brings on hearing loss and often tinnitus. If you are older, advancing age is generally accompanied by a certain amount of hearing nerve impairment and tinnitus. If you are younger, exposure to loud noise is probably the leading cause of tinnitus, and often damages hearing as well.

There are many causes for “subjective tinnitus,” the noise only you can hear. Some causes are not serious (a small plug of wax in the ear canal might cause temporary tinnitus). Tinnitus can also be a symptom of stiffening of the middle ear bones (otosclerosis)

Tinnitus may also be caused by allergy, high or low blood pressure (blood circulation problems), a tumor, diabetes, thyroid problems, injury to the head or neck, and a variety of other causes including medications such as

anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, sedatives, antidepressants, and aspirin. If you take aspirin and your ears ring, talk to your doctor about dosage in relation to your size.

Treatment will be quite different in each case of tinnitus. It is important to see an otolaryngologist to investigate the cause of your tinnitus so that the best treatment can be determined.

What is the treatment?

In most cases, there is no specific treatment for ear and head noise. If your otolaryngologist finds a specific cause of your tinnitus, he or she may be able to eliminate the noise. But, this determination may require extensive testing, including X-rays, balance tests, and laboratory work. However, most causes cannot be identified. Occasionally, medicine may help the noise. The medications used are varied, and several may be tried to see if they help.

The following list of Do's and Don'ts can help lessen the severity of tinnitus:

- Avoid exposure to loud sounds and noises.
- Get your blood pressure checked. If it is high, get your doctor's help to control it.
- Decrease your intake of salt. Salt impairs blood circulation.
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea, cola, and tobacco.
- Exercise daily to improve your circulation.
- Get adequate rest and avoid fatigue.
- Stop worrying about the noise. Recognize your head noise as an annoyance and learn to ignore it as much as possible.

What can help me cope with tinnitus?

Concentration and relaxation exercises can help to control muscle groups and circulation throughout the body. The increased relaxation and circulation achieved by these exercises can reduce the intensity of tinnitus in some patients.

Masking. Tinnitus is usually more bothersome in quiet surroundings. A competing sound as a constant low level, such as a ticking clock or radio static (white noise), may mask the tinnitus and make it less noticeable. Products that generate white noise are also available through catalogs and specialty stores.

Hearing Aids. If you have a hearing loss, a hearing aid(s) may reduce head noise while you're wearing it and sometimes cause it to go away temporarily. It is important not to set the hearing aid at excessively loud levels, as this can worsen the tinnitus in some cases. However, a thorough trial before purchase of a hearing aid is advisable if your primary purpose is the relief of tinnitus.

Tinnitus maskers can be combined within hearing aids. They emit a competitive but pleasant sound that can distract you from head noise. Some people find that a tinnitus masker may even suppress the head noise for several hours after it is used, but this is not true for all users.

Summary

Prior to any treatment of tinnitus or head noise, it is important that you have a thorough examination and evaluation by your otolaryngologist. An essential part of your treatment will be your understanding of tinnitus and its causes.

*Reprinted from the Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery website: www.entlink.net

Twenty tips to help you manage your tinnitus

Diagnose & understand your tinnitus

1. DO NOT panic. Tinnitus is usually not a sign of a serious, ongoing medical condition.
2. CHECK things out. The sounds you hear may actually be normal sounds created by the human body at work.
3. SEE an audiologist or ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT) interested and experienced in tinnitus treatment.
4. REVIEW your current medications (prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins and other supplements) with your medical professional to find possible causes of your tinnitus.
5. BE WARY of a hopeless diagnosis or physician advice like, "There's nothing you can do about your tinnitus. Go home and live with it."
6. BE a detective. Keep track of what triggers your tinnitus.
7. KEEP UP TO DATE about tinnitus. More and more research by the best and the brightest is bringing us closer to successful treatments and cures for tinnitus.

Find good treatment & take care of yourself

8. BE KIND to yourself. Developing tinnitus means you have undergone a significant physical, emotional and maybe even life-style change.
9. EXAMINE how you live to find ways to eliminate or reduce some stress in different parts of your life; stress often makes tinnitus worse.
10. PAY ATTENTION to what you eat. One-by-one, eliminate possible sources of tinnitus aggravation, e.g., salt, artificial sweeteners, sugar, alcohol, prescription or over-the-counter medications, tobacco and caffeine.
(Do not stop taking medications without consulting with your health care professional.)
11. DON'T GIVE UP on a treatment if it doesn't work right away. Some can take quite a while to have a positive effect.
12. PROTECT YOURSELF from further auditory damage by avoiding loud places and by using earplugs when you can't avoid loud noise.

Your attitude matters

13. DO NOT create any negative forecasts for your tinnitus, such as "This is never going to get any better." Counting on a better future can help you create one.
14. TAKE HEART. In many cases people with tinnitus "habituate" to it, meaning they get used to it and notice it less than at first.
15. BE INVOLVED in your recovery. Consider yourself part of your treatment team where your thoughts and feelings should count.
16. DO NOT WASTE time blaming yourself for your tinnitus. The causes of tinnitus are varied and difficult to determine.

Line up support

17. LOCATE people who understand your struggles and learn that you are not alone. Have people in your life who, though they cannot "see" or "hear" your tinnitus, understand that you have it.

18. FIND a support group that will truly understand your struggles with tinnitus and help you sort out useful from useless information. You will find compassion, companionship and coping strategies. (ATA has [information](#) on tinnitus support groups and individual, helpful volunteers.)
19. EDUCATE your family, friends and co-workers about tinnitus; tell them about the conditions and settings that are difficult for you; and ask them for their support.
20. CONTINUE SEEKING reliable information from ATA and other credible sources.

WWW.ATA.org (American Tinnitus Association)