

TINNITUS

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus (TIN-i-tus) is noise or ringing in the ears. A common problem, tinnitus affects about 1 in 5 people. Tinnitus isn't a condition itself — it's a symptom of an underlying condition, such as age-related hearing loss, ear injury or a circulatory system disorder.

Although bothersome, tinnitus usually isn't a sign of something serious. Although it can worsen with age, for many people, tinnitus can improve with treatment. Treating an identified underlying cause sometimes helps. Other treatments reduce or mask the noise, making tinnitus less noticeable.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Tinnitus involves the annoying sensation of hearing sound when no external sound is present. Tinnitus symptoms include these types of phantom noises in your ears:

Ringing, Buzzing, Roaring, Clicking, Whistling, Hissing

The phantom noise may vary in pitch from a low roar to a high squeal, and you may hear it in one or both ears. In some cases, the sound can be so loud it can interfere with your ability to concentrate or hear actual sound. Tinnitus may be present all the time, or it may come and go.

How do you know if you've got tinnitus?

There are two kinds of tinnitus.

Subjective tinnitus is tinnitus only you can hear. This is the most common type of tinnitus. It can be caused by ear problems in your outer, middle or inner ear. It also can be caused by problems with the hearing (auditory) nerves or the part of your brain that interprets nerve signals as sound. Objective tinnitus is tinnitus your doctor can hear when he or she does an examination. This rare type of tinnitus may be caused by a blood vessel problem, an inner ear bone condition or muscle contractions.

A number of health conditions can cause or worsen tinnitus. In many cases, an exact cause is never found.

A common cause of tinnitus is inner ear cell damage. Tiny, delicate hairs in your inner ear move in relation to the pressure of sound waves. This triggers ear cells to release an electrical signal through a nerve from your ear (auditory nerve) to your brain. Your brain interprets these signals as sound. If the hairs inside your inner ear are bent or broken, they can "leak" random electrical impulses to your brain, causing tinnitus.

Other causes of tinnitus include other ear problems, chronic health conditions, and injuries or conditions that affect your auditory nerves or the hearing centre in your brain.

How do you get tinnitus?

A variety of other conditions and illnesses can lead to tinnitus, including:

- Blockages of the ear due to a build up of wax, an ear infection, or rarely, a benign tumor of the nerve that allows us to hear (auditory nerve)
- Certain drugs -- most notably aspirin, several types of antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, sedatives, and antidepressants, as well as quinine medications; tinnitus is cited as a potential side effect for about 200 prescription and non-prescription drugs.
- The natural aging process, which can cause deterioration of the cochlea or other parts of the ear
- Meniere's disease, which affects the inner part of the ear
- Otosclerosis, a disease that results in stiffening of the small bones in the middle ear
- Other medical conditions such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, circulatory problems, anaemia, allergies,

an underactive thyroid gland, and diabetes

- Neck or jaw problems, such as temporomandibular joint (TMJ) syndrome
- Injuries to the head and neck

Tinnitus can worsen in some people if they drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, drink caffeinated beverages, or eat certain foods.

For reasons not yet entirely clear to researchers, stress and fatigue seem to worsen tinnitus.

How is tinnitus treated?

If your tinnitus is a symptom of an underlying medical condition, the first step is to treat that condition. But if the tinnitus remains after treatment, or if it results from exposure to loud noise, health professionals recommend various non-medical options that may help reduce or mask the unwanted noise. Sometimes, tinnitus goes away spontaneously, without any intervention at all. It should be understood, however, that not all tinnitus could be eliminated or reduced, no matter the cause.

If the cause of your tinnitus is excessive earwax, your doctor will clean out your ears by suction with a small curved instrument called a curette, or gently flush it out with warm water. If you have an ear infection, you may be given prescription eardrops containing hydrocortisone to help relieve the itching and an antibiotic to fight the infection.

Surgery may be necessary in rare cases of a tumor, cyst, or otosclerosis (a calcium deposit on the ear bone).

If your tinnitus is the result of temporomandibular joint syndrome your doctor will probably refer you to an orthodontist or other dental specialist for appropriate treatment. If tight muscles are part of the problem, massage therapy may help relieve it.

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Womens_Health_Watch/2011/September/tinnitus-ringing-in-the-ears-and-what-to-do-about-it

Although no vitamin supplements or other alternative therapies have been proven beneficial to treat tinnitus, some people try herbal preparations such as ginkgo biloba or minerals such as zinc or magnesium with varying results. Others have experienced relief with acupuncture, magnets, or hypnosis.

<http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/understanding-tinnitus-treatment>

How can I avoid getting tinnitus?

Your risk of developing tinnitus increases with exposure to loud noises, so hearing protection is an important intervention. If you are around a noise that is so loud you cannot speak at a normal conversation level, you should wear earplugs, move away from the noise source, or turn it down.