

Tinnitus — Noise In Your Ears

Tinnitus

If you hear sounds such as ringing, roaring, clicking or hissing in your ears, you may have a condition called tinnitus. Most of the time, tinnitus is a sign that you have some kind of hearing loss. It can, however, also be a sign of a health problem.

Tinnitus affects many people. According to the American Tinnitus Association, about 50 million people in the United States have tinnitus.

Tinnitus cannot be cured, but there are treatments that may give you some relief.

Causes of Tinnitus

There are a number of possible causes of tinnitus:

- **hearing loss:** Research shows that people who have some form of hearing loss also have tinnitus.
- **loud noise:** Too much loud noise can cause hearing loss that leads to tinnitus.
- **medicines:** More than 200 medicines can cause tinnitus. If you have noise in your ears and you take medicine, ask your health care provider or pharmacist if your medicine could be causing tinnitus.
- **health problems:** Allergies, hormone changes, tumors, or problems with your heart, blood vessels, jaw or neck can cause tinnitus.

Diagnosing Tinnitus

It is important for you to see your health care provider if you think you might have tinnitus. He or she will try to determine the cause and make sure there isn't an underlying health problem.

Your health care provider may refer you to an otolaryngologist (doctor who specializes in ear, nose and throat conditions). He or she will work with you to find out if the tinnitus is related to another health problem.

Your health care provider or otolaryngologist will likely refer you to an audiologist (a hearing professional) for a hearing test. The results of the hearing test can help diagnose tinnitus. The audiologist can help with possible treatments for tinnitus.

Treating Tinnitus

There are a number of treatments for tinnitus. Your health care providers may recommend one or more of the following:

- **hearing aids:** If you also have hearing loss, a hearing aid can help you hear better by making sounds louder. If you can hear sounds better, you may not notice the noise in your ears from tinnitus.
- **sound therapy:** Sound is used to make tinnitus less noticeable. Types of sound therapy include music, devices that make sound (such as nature sounds) and ear level devices (create sound such as music or white noise).

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- **retraining:** An audiologist or other professional can teach ways to lower your awareness of tinnitus. This is usually used with sound therapy.
- **cognitive therapy:** A counselor can treat your emotional reaction to tinnitus. He or she can work with you to change negative thoughts and behaviors.
- **biofeedback:** This is a relaxation technique that helps you learn how to manage your body's responses to stress or disease. This can help to lower your awareness of tinnitus.
- **relaxing:** Stress can make tinnitus worse. Learning how to relax can help you rest better and have more energy to deal with tinnitus. Breathing exercises are an easy way to lower stress.

Self-help for Tinnitus

Besides using the treatments your health care providers recommend, there are some other things you can do to lessen the impact of tinnitus on your life.

- Identify what can help you cope. You might find that music or recordings of nature sounds help mask tinnitus noise or help you forget about it for a while.
- Avoid things that make tinnitus worse. These include smoking, alcohol, caffeine and loud noise. Also try to limit the amount of sodium (salt) you have each day.
- If your work exposes you to loud noise, wear earplugs or equipment that will protect your hearing.

**Information adapted from the
National Institutes of Health.**