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## **Tinnitus Information:**

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### **Tinnitus explained**

Tinnitus is a physical condition, experienced as noises or ringing in the ears or head, when no such external physical noise is present. Tinnitus is not a disease in itself. It is a symptom of a fault in the auditory (hearing) system, which includes the ears and the brain. The word 'tinnitus' is Latin in origin and means 'tinkling or ringing like a bell'.

### **Tinnitus is common**

Approximately 17 to 20 per cent of Australians suffer from some degree of tinnitus, varying from mild to severe. The percentage of people who are severely affected is small. It is common for tinnitus to fluctuate with stress or tiredness, but this has no harmful significance.

### **Types of sounds experienced with tinnitus**

There are many different sounds associated with tinnitus; some of the most common are:

- Ringing
- Roaring
- Humming
- Buzzing
- Whistling

Every person describes and experiences it differently.

### **What causes tinnitus?**

Among the more common causes of tinnitus are:

Exposure to loud sounds, extreme stress or trauma, degeneration ('wear and tear') of the small bones in the middle ear. Ear problems, such as otosclerosis (fixation of the tiny stirrup bone in middle ear), Meniere's disease (swelling of a duct in the ear), as well as some prescription and non-prescription drugs.

### **Major preventable causes of tinnitus**

The two major preventable causes of tinnitus are:

Exposure to loud noise - for example, noisy lawn mowers or chainsaws: People at high risk include industrial workers, farmers and transport workers. Rock concerts, boom boxes in cars and playing a Walkman loudly can also be hazardous. Medications - for example, some prescription, and non-prescription medications. If you have tinnitus, always check with your doctor whether the drug they are prescribing for you has a side effect of causing or exacerbating tinnitus.

### **How tinnitus affects people**

Tinnitus can be extremely debilitating, affecting peoples' ability to work or cope with normal life activities.

People with tinnitus may suffer from:

Extreme distress (this is common)

Depression

Frequent mood swings, depression or anxiety attacks

- Tension, irritability or frustration
- Poor concentration
- Sleep problems.

Thoughts of suicide are common in the early stages.

## **Tinnitus treatments**

Many people are wrongly told that nothing can be done about their tinnitus and that they will just have to learn to live with it. Although there is no cure for tinnitus, those affected can learn techniques to successfully manage their tinnitus to the point where it is no longer a problem for them. People with tinnitus can continue to lead full and productive lives.

### **Avoid exposure to loud noise**

Loud noise will exacerbate tinnitus:

- Wear ear muffs or ear plugs for activities such as mowing the lawn or using a chainsaw.
- Avoid loud nightclubs or use ear protection. If you have to shout to make yourself heard when someone is standing about one metre from you, the noise level is too loud and will make your tinnitus worse.

### **Avoid stress**

There is strong anecdotal evidence that stress exacerbates tinnitus. Although stress is part of everyday life, you can take steps to reduce stress levels by undertaking relaxation therapies.

### **Hearing aids**

Good quality and properly fitting hearing aids can:

- Reduce your perception of tinnitus by improving your hearing
- Take away the strain of listening.
- Some aids can also be used to mask tinnitus.

### **Medications**

There are no specific drugs for the treatment of tinnitus. Sedatives and drugs may prove helpful in the early stages. However, drugs without counselling are rarely effective. Alternative medicines and acupuncture only rarely seem to be helpful.

### **Surgery**

Surgery is seldom justified and can aggravate tinnitus.

### **Hypnotherapy and cognitive behaviour therapy**

Hypnotherapy can indirectly help by aiding relaxation. Cognitive behaviour, which is offered by clinical psychologists, can help you to:

- Change the way you think about tinnitus
- Learn ways to focus your attention away from your tinnitus
- Control the stress associated with tinnitus.

### **Diet**

Diet regimes are sometimes helpful. However, dietary exclusion trials are needed to prove or disprove that suspected foods aggravate tinnitus. Try easing off caffeine (tea, coffee, chocolate or cola drinks) and alcohol as they can temporarily worsen tinnitus for some people. Also avoid quinine (tonic water), nicotine, and marijuana.

### **Other treatments**

- Tinnitus maskers (WNG) - which can provide temporary relief in the early stages. However, maskers can reduce your ability to become habituated ('used to') your tinnitus Neuromonics
- Tinnitus retraining therapy - which can reduce your perception of tinnitus.
- Be wary of tinnitus 'cures'
- There are many so-called tinnitus 'cures' on the market. Most of these have no scientific basis. If you have a query about a specific treatment, consult your doctor or contact the Tinnitus Australia.

**Where to get help** . Tinnitus Australia – <https://www.tinnitusaustralia.org.au> and your local Doctor