

# TINNITUS

## **What is Tinnitus?**

Tinnitus is often described as “ringing” or “buzzing” in the ears, but it can be any sound or combination of sounds. Tinnitus results from nerve activity that the brain interprets as “sound.” Everyone experiences tinnitus sometimes. Some people experience constant, or near-constant tinnitus.

## **How do you pronounce “Tinnitus”?**

“ti-**n**ight-us” or “**tin**-uh-tus” – either is correct.

## **How common is tinnitus?**

The American Tinnitus Association estimates that 50 million individuals in the United States have tinnitus. It is likely that 3-4 million veterans experience tinnitus.

## **What causes tinnitus?**

The most common cause of tinnitus is exposure to loud noise. Tinnitus can also result from head injury, medications, ear wax, and many other causes. It can be impossible to know the exact cause of tinnitus because it is associated with so many conditions, such as high blood pressure, stress, dental problems, metabolic problems, and high cholesterol.

## **What is the connection between hearing loss and tinnitus?**

Damage to the ears often results in both hearing loss and tinnitus. However, they do not always occur together. Tinnitus does not cause hearing loss but sometimes tinnitus can seem to interfere with hearing. An audiologist can determine if you have a hearing problem.

## **Is there a cure for tinnitus?**

A “cure” would be some way to make the tinnitus sound stop. There are treatments for tinnitus but research has not yet found a cure.

## **Do I need treatment for my tinnitus?**

Treatment can make tinnitus less of a problem. Not everyone with tinnitus needs treatment. Treatment may be helpful for you if your tinnitus is affecting your sleep, ability to concentrate, emotional well-being, or daily activities.

You may need a medical evaluation if your tinnitus is on one side of the head, or if you have changes in your hearing, ear pain, head or neck problems, or balance issues.

## **What form of treatment is most effective?**

There are several methods for tinnitus treatment. Please see your audiologist to discuss these choices. Even changes in lifestyle can be helpful. Some resources are listed at the end of this information sheet.

## **What treatments do healthcare professionals provide?**

### **Physician**

A doctor can often help if your tinnitus is causing sleep problems, anxiety, or depression. An ear, nose, and throat (ENT) doctor can check for any medical problems that may be causing your tinnitus. Check with your doctor to find out if tinnitus is a side effect of your medication. Have your doctor check your ears for ear wax.

### **Audiologist**

Some audiologists have been trained in tinnitus treatment. Two methods used by audiologists are Masking and Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT). These methods focus on making tinnitus less of a problem. Sometimes hearing aids can be used to treat tinnitus. To find an audiologist in your area call your local VA Audiology Clinic or see the information listed at the end of this information sheet.

### **Psychologist**

Many psychological methods have been used to manage pain and reduce stress. These methods can be helpful in treating tinnitus. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy has been successful in treating pain. This method has been adapted to treat tinnitus.

### **Complementary and alternative providers**

Many “complementary and alternative” methods have been suggested for tinnitus. These include vitamins and herbs, acupuncture, naturopathic treatment, hypnosis, and others.

### **How will hearing aids affect my tinnitus?**

Some people with hearing loss find that hearing aids help make tinnitus less noticeable. Hearing aids can help with a hearing problem by amplifying sounds. This also keeps the ears “busy” causing the tinnitus to be less bothersome.

### **What if I think my tinnitus was caused during my military service?**

Hearing loss or tinnitus may be judged to be a VA disability. For more information contact your **VA Regional Office (1-800-827-1000)** or contact a local Service Officer.

### **WHAT CAN I DO TODAY ABOUT MY TINNITUS?**

- **Avoid loud noise.** Loud noise can make your tinnitus temporarily or permanently worse. Protect yourself from loud noise such as, loud music, power tools, chain saws, guns, and factory noise. When you are around these types of loud noises use earplugs or earmuffs.
- **Avoid total silence.** Being in a quiet room may make your tinnitus more noticeable. To help with this, try being around low-volume, pleasant sounds, such as music or nature sounds (especially water). Devices that produce sound include radios, CD players, tabletop fountains, sound generators, and electric fans.
- **Lifestyle changes that might help:**
  - Reduce excessive use of caffeine, alcohol, salt, aspirin, and nicotine
  - Reduce stress as much as possible
  - Get adequate sleep
  - Keep your mind and body busy with meaningful activities
  - Establish a healthy diet
  - Exercise regularly

### **Where can I learn more about tinnitus?**

Many sources of information are available in books, on the Internet, and through various organizations. Some resources are listed below. Contact your local VA Audiology Clinic for further information.

American Tinnitus Association [www.ata.org](http://www.ata.org) PO Box 5, Portland OR 97207-0005  
(800) 634-8978 or (503) 248-9985

National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research [www.ncrar.org](http://www.ncrar.org) **Portland VAMC**  
3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Road, Portland OR 97239

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