

Tinnitus

Tinnitus is the name given to ringing, clicking, hissing, buzzing, roaring or other noises in the ears. It comes from the Latin and means “to ring a bell”. Usually only the person suffering from the tinnitus hears it. Tinnitus may be in one ear or both; it may be continuous, intermittent, loud, soft, and it may change from time to time. 75% of people with tinnitus are not bothered by it at all.

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is not a disease; it is a natural, normal phenomenon of the human hearing system. Some researchers call tinnitus the “background music of the brain”.

However, tinnitus may be a symptom of a medical problem; therefore, it is important that a physician performs a thorough investigation. Tinnitus may be an early warning of hearing damage, such as in the case of exposure to noise or ototoxic drugs (drugs which are toxic to the inner ear). Certain antibiotics such as some of the “-mycin” family, quinine, and even aspirin, taken in very high doses, may cause ringing in the ears and/or hearing loss. Head injuries or various infections may also cause tinnitus. Tinnitus is also often a side effect of a number of drugs. Even things like too much caffeine or salt intake cause cause tinnitus, as well as stress!

How is it managed?

What needs to be managed is a person’s response to tinnitus. Many forms of treatment for the relief of tinnitus have been tried, with more or less success: vitamin therapy, biofeedback, hypno-therapy, acupuncture, drugs such as antidepressants, tranquilizers, even surgery. Many cases of tinnitus are not relieved by these methods, though some relaxation techniques help. There is also a program called “Tinnitus Retraining Therapy” that may be helpful.

Tinnitus is more noticeable when the surroundings are quiet, and this causes problems getting to sleep. Tuning a radio to soft music or to static between stations can provide a distraction from the tinnitus. Putting on an electric fan in the room may also help.

If there is a hearing loss as well, using a hearing aid may help. The hearing aid amplifies speech and environmental sounds, which serves to distract the listener from the tinnitus. When someone does not have enough hearing loss to require a hearing aid, a masking device may be provided, either a table-top or a wearable type. This device creates a noise which is similar in pitch to an individual's tinnitus.

For more information, contact:

a. Tinnitus Association of Canada
http://www.kadis.com/ta/tinnitus_1.htm

b. American Tinnitus Association
<http://www.ata.org>

c. The Tinnitus and Hyperacusis Centre
<http://www.tinnitus.org>

Note: tinnitus information obtained over the internet should be interpreted cautiously as information may not be accurate or reliable depending, on the source.