

TINNITUS



Hearing aids can help in blocking out the ringing noise.

THAT RINGING IN YOUR EARS COULD SPELL BAD NEWS FOR YOUR HEARING.

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HOW IS IT TREATED?

Most patients with chronic tinnitus learn to cope with the condition or ignore it with time, such that they only hear it when the room is completely silent. As these periods of silence coincide with bedtime, some patients choose to play background music while sleeping to mask the tinnitus. For those with concurrent hearing loss, hearing aids are highly effective at blocking out the tinnitus in addition to improving hearing.

Some patients may try remedies like ginkgo biloba and acupuncture, but there is only weak evidence for their efficacy. For those whose tinnitus is troubling, counselling and therapy by audiologists can be helpful.



Tinnitus is often a symptom for other inner ear conditions.

WHAT IS IT?

A common phenomenon, tinnitus is the perception of a sound that is not heard by others. It frequently sounds like ringing or buzzing in the ear, but a crackling, whooshing, humming or cicada-like sound is not uncommon.

Tinnitus is a symptom of other problems within the inner ear. It may be associated with hearing loss, ear 'fullness' or vertigo.

HOW IS IT CAUSED?

The most common cause is presbycusis, or age-related hearing loss. It is frequently present in hearing loss caused by other conditions like excessive noise exposure or ear 'toxicity' caused by certain drugs — in fact, in patients taking chemotherapy drugs, tinnitus may be a warning of impending hearing loss.

Patients suffering from an inner-ear condition called Ménière's disease get repeated episodes of tinnitus associated with hearing loss, ear fullness and vertigo which is believed to be due to an imbalance of fluid within the ear.

Occasionally, it can be due to earwax or other objects resting against the eardrum. In rare cases, it can be the result of blood flow abnormalities close to the ear, which sounds like 'pulsating whooshes' to the sufferer.



HOW CAN IT BE AVOIDED?

As tinnitus is closely linked to hearing loss, the most effective way to avoid it is to protect the ears from damage by turning down personal music players, and by using ear defenders when working in very noisy environments.

Extensive exposure to sounds over 85 decibels can cause hearing damage.

