SOUNDFAIR

TINNITUS.
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE.

FACT SHEET

Tinnitus is a very common experience. It affects about 10 to 20 per cent of people, and is especially common in older adults.

WHAT IS TINNITUS?

Tinnitus is the name given to a sound a person can hear, but others cannot. This is because the sound they hear is coming from within them, and not the world outside. While tinnitus sounds different to each person, common descriptions include ringing, clicking, nature sounds, such as cicadas or crickets, or even rushing water. Some hear it in their head, while others may hear it in one or both ears.

Tinnitus can come on suddenly, or creep up gradually over time and the most common cause of tinnitus onset is a hearing loss or change of hearing. While it may seem odd, it is very common, with an estimated 10–20% of people experiencing it. In fact, one study found that 95% of people with normal hearing heard 'tinnitus' after being left in a quiet room! This led to the belief that tinnitus may be far more common than we realise, just too soft for most people to hear.

WHAT CAUSES TINNITUS?

Why do some people hear tinnitus all the time, and others do not? For some there may be an easy explanation, such as a build-up of earwax, certain medicines, or exposure to loud sounds, but for others it can be a bit more complicated. For this reason, we advise seeing an audiologist to help you find out what is important to you. An audiologist can help you:

- Understand the experience
- Confirm the diagnosis
- Check your hearing
- Look for a related cause
- Discuss a management plan

MANAGING TINNITUS

When it comes to managing tinnitus, it is important to look at the whole person. Tinnitus is a symptom of many small changes that have taken place in your body over time. For example, most people know that stress impacts their health, but did you know it can also impact your tinnitus? Or take your head and neck – your ears are surrounded by a web of muscles and ligaments, and how well they work can be related. For this reason, your audiologist may recommend management plans that treat you as a whole person, from talking to your GP about the medicines you take, seeking support from a psychologist, or even visiting your dentist to assess the health of your jaw. The goal of management is to help provide you with the support you need for the tinnitus and the impact it has on your life.

While exploring your tinnitus, friends and family can be very helpful. But it can be hard to find the words to describe something they can't hear with you. If you are experiencing tinnitus, it may help to describe it using silence. Most people never stop to think about how important silence is for them, but it is there for us whenever we sleep, rest, or relax. Having tinnitus enter that space is a big change. For that reason, people with tinnitus may have difficulties with concentration, sleep patterns and even their mental health.

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> It's finding ways to be calm, ways to relax, ways to de-stress or unstress and they've provided me with a lot of great help in a time of high anxiety.

If you are experiencing tinnitus for the first time, it may be helpful to know that you are not alone. Some people fear that their tinnitus will get worse forever, but that isn't true. Tinnitus is a symptom, not a disease, one that changes over time in response to many factors, including our health. Working with your audiologist you can slowly understand the things that make your tinnitus better, or worse, as you work towards management. The more we understand our tinnitus, the more we can regain control and actively work towards reducing its impact on our life.

In some cases, the impacts of tinnitus may lead you to feel you can no longer cope. If you feel in need of urgent assistance, please call Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636. While the information provided will not be specific to tinnitus, their expertise in all areas of mental health will ensure you are supported at times of greatest need.

All other, non-urgent persistent matters should be discussed with your audiologist or medical practitioner. Tinnitus Australia is available online and via the Hearing Line to offer extra support.

FURTHER READING

Baguley D, Andersson G, McFerran D & McKenna L, (2013) Tinnitus: A Multidisciplinary Approach. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
R. F. F. Cima et al, (2019) A multidisciplinary European Guideline for Tinnitus: diagnostics, assessment, and treatment HNO · 67 (Suppl 1):S10–S42

This factsheet is intended to be a guide of a general nature, having regard to general circumstances. The information presented should not be relied on as a substitute for medical advice, independent judgement or assessment by a healthcare professional, with consideration of the particular needs and individual circumstances. This factsheet reflects information available at the time of its preparation, but its currency should be determined having regard to other available information. Tinnitus Australia disclaims all liability to users of the information provided.

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MAKING HEARING SEEN AND PEOPLE HEARD.