

# TINNITUS



Learn about the symptoms,  
causes, and treatments for  
Tinnitus

# Tinnitus 101 – What You Need to Know About Tinnitus

If you ever experience ringing in your ears, it might be from a condition called tinnitus. While not a medical condition on its own, tinnitus is a term used to determine if there is another condition of your ears you need to be concerned about. In the coming pages, you will learn about tinnitus and what can be done about it.

## *What is Tinnitus?*

Tinnitus is the medical term for phantom ringing you hear in your ears. This means that the noise is not happening in your environment. For instance, no one can hear the ringing but you. Tinnitus is common because it affects about 1 in 5 individuals. Although it affects your ears, it is not a medical condition. It is classified as a symptom resulting from an underlying medical condition. An underlying medical condition is classified as a disease, infection or disorder of some type.

If you have tinnitus, you may suffer from one of two types of the medical symptoms: subjective and objective tinnitus. Subjective tinnitus can only be heard by you. Subjective tinnitus is the form of tinnitus people commonly develop.

It can develop because you had medical problems with your inner, middle or outer ear. In addition to problems hearing, your auditory nerves may also be affected. Your auditory nerves, located in your brain, is responsible for interpreting the nerve signals that you hear into sounds.

Objective tinnitus is phantom noise your physician can hear while they are examining your ears. This is a rare form of the condition. It is often caused by issues with your blood vessel, muscle contractions or a medical condition in your middle ear bone.

The ringing in your ears is bothersome. However, it is not serious and is not fatal.

There is no cure for tinnitus. With treatment and identifying the underlying cause of tinnitus, you may notice improvement in symptoms.

## **1. Signs and Symptoms**

The most obvious symptom of tinnitus is the ringing in your ears. You may not experience ringing in the ears, but a different sound such as buzzing, clicking, humming, roaring and hissing. The noise may occur intermittently.

This means you may hear the ringing in your ears, then it will stop just as suddenly as it started. You may experience throbbing and pain in your ears. The sound is a high-pitched sound that is continuous. Decreased hearing may also occur when you have tinnitus.

You may experience symptoms that are not directly related to the buzzing or ringing in your ears. These symptoms include depression, anxiety, difficulty sleeping and lack of concentration.

## **2. What Causes Tinnitus?**

Researchers cannot find the exact reason why Tinnitus occurs. However, numerous health condition can worsen the ear problem. From what researchers have gathered, inner ear cell damage is the common cause of tinnitus. The delicate, small hairs located in your inner ear sway according to the pressure of the sound waves you hear.

Your ear cells are triggered to release the transmitted electrical signal to your auditory nerve and then to your brain. Your brain is responsible for interpreting the electrical signal as sounds.

Any time the delicate, small hairs in your inner ear become broken or bent, they do not work properly. Instead, they create electrical impulses that are randomly sent to your brain. Your brain is responsible for interpreting these sounds. This is how you hear ringing or buzzing in your ears when no one is ringing a bell.

The most common causes include:

1. Being in an environment with extremely loud noise. A concert, listening to music too loud and heavy equipment can cause tinnitus when you are exposed to loud noise.
2. Hearing loss that occurs because of age. Loss of hearing typically starts when you are 60 years old.
3. Changes in your ear bone. Your ear bone in your middle ear can stiffen and changes the way you hear.
4. Earwax blockage. Earwax blockage occurs because of wax buildup in the ear.

The next leading cause of tinnitus is medications. Certain medications can either cause the condition or make it worse. What happens is the higher the dosage of medication, the worse the ringing in the ears become. The phantom noise tends to disappear when you stop taking the medication.

Some medications are known to cause tinnitus or make it worse. For instance, some antibiotics and antidepressants may cause or worsen tinnitus. Taken in high doses, aspirin cause tinnitus or make tinnitus worse. Quinine medications and water pills, called diuretics, often cause tinnitus. Certain cancer medications like vincristine and mechlorethamine cause ringing in your ears.

Some medical conditions may cause this condition, but it does not occur very often. For example, head or neck injuries can cause damage to your brain and hearing nerves. The damage usually causes tinnitus in only one ear. Acoustic neuroma, a noncancerous tumor in your cranial nerve, can cause ringing in one ear.

Blood vessel disorders are also the cause of tinnitus. However, this link between blood vessel disorders and this condition is rare. Some vessels disorders that cause ringing in your ears include atherosclerosis, high blood pressure and turbulent blood flow.

### **3. The Risk Factors Associated with Tinnitus**

Any person can develop tinnitus in one or both ears. However, certain factors can increase your risk of developing the condition. For instance, exposure to loud noise can increase your chances of developing tinnitus. Cardiovascular problems, such as high blood pressure or atherosclerosis, can increase your risk of developing this condition. Smoking and age can both increase the risk of developing tinnitus. Men typically develop tinnitus at a higher rate than women.

### **4. Possible Complications**

Every medical condition has complications. Tinnitus is no different. These complications can be serious because they affect individuals differently. In fact, it may change your quality of life. Some complications that can occur if you have tinnitus include, but are not limited to memory problems, stress, fatigue, problems sleeping and fatigue. You may feel irritable for no reason.

Treating the underlying condition that caused tinnitus can relieve the symptoms that develop because of the complications.

### **5. How Tinnitus is Diagnosed**

If you believe you have Tinnitus, do not self-diagnose. Instead, schedule an appointment with a physician. Your physician will determine if you have the condition and the underlying cause of the tinnitus. During your physical examination, your physician will look at your neck, ears and neck for possible signs of the condition.

You may undergo an imaging test such as a CT scan. The physical examination may include a movement test to determine if an underlying cause of the ringing in your ears is due to a disorder that needs treatment. You will move your neck, arms and legs. You will clench and unclench your jaw.

You will also look in various directions without turning your head so your physician will determine if you have an eye problem. An audiological examination, or hearing test, may also be ordered.

The type of sound you hear will help your physician identify the possible cause of the sound in your ears.

For example, a clicking sound means that your muscles around and in your ears are making that noise. A low-pitched ringing in your ears in one ear may indicate Meniere's disease. The disease may be the underlying cause of the ringing in your ears if it is accompanied by a moving or spinning sensation.

The source of high-pitched ringing in the ears is exposure to loud noise. You may have suffered a blow to the ear. The physician may determine it is acoustic neuroma.

## **6. What You Should Know About Treatment**

If you are diagnosed with tinnitus, your physician will find the underlying condition. This medical condition, disease or disease will be treated first because it may be associated with Tinnitus symptoms. Your physician may take measures to decrease the phantom noise you hear.

### *Removing the Earwax*

For example, your physician may remove the earwax from your ears. This will decrease your tinnitus symptoms. If medications you are on is causing your tinnitus symptoms, your physicians will change the dosage to decrease your symptoms.

### *Blood Vessel Disorders*

Another treatment option is to treat your blood vessel disorder, if that is the cause of your ear condition. This is an underlying vascular condition that may require you to undergo surgery or take medication to treat the condition.

Once the underlying medical condition, disorder or disease has been diagnosed, your physician may treat your tinnitus symptoms. This may help you avoid complications and severe symptoms associated with the condition.

### *Medications*

For instance, you may take tricyclic antidepressants. These antidepressants, which includes nortriptyline, has successfully decreased tinnitus symptoms. However, they do have severe side effects of their own. The medications' side effects include blurred vision, dry mouth heart problems and constipation.

Alprazolam, different type of medication, can be used to reduce the severity of tinnitus symptoms. The side effects of the medication such as Xanax includes nausea and drowsiness. It may become addictive.

### *Lifestyle Changes You May Need to Make Based on a Tinnitus Diagnosis*

Tinnitus typically cannot be treated. The best outcome with treatment is to decrease the severity of the symptoms. However, you can make some lifestyle changes to help lessen the tinnitus symptoms.

One change to make is reduce your alcohol intake. Alcohol increases the amount of force your body uses to push blood through your blood vessels. This causes an increased amount of flow to areas such as your inner ear.

Another change you can make to reduce tinnitus symptoms is to reduce the amount of noise in your environment. Keep things like the radio, television and fan at the lowest speeds to help decrease your symptoms. Also, manage stress and avoid

irritants like nicotine, caffeine and loud noise. All three things can cause your tinnitus symptoms to become more severe.

You may be wondering about the use of alternative medicine to treat tinnitus. Research shows little evidence that alternative medical treatments like acupuncture, hypnosis and zinc supplements actually cure or treat tinnitus.

### *Is Tinnitus Ever a Medical Emergency?*

Yes. If you have tinnitus symptoms that occur suddenly or without a cause, contact your physician immediately. Another medical emergency that needs immediate medical attention is if you have dizziness and hearing loss along with tinnitus symptoms. These are two situations that may have a serious underlying cause. Contact your physician if you develop tinnitus that hasn't gone away in a week after developing an upper respiratory infection.

### *Can Tinnitus be Prevented?*

No. In many situations, you cannot avoid developing tinnitus because you have a risk factor that contributed to the condition. However, you can try to decrease the chances of developing hearing issue by doing certain things. For example, turn down the volume while listening to music and television. Both contribute to the development of tinnitus. If you work in an environment with loud noise, use hearing protection. Also, focus on your cardiovascular health to reduce the risk acquiring this condition. Exercise and eating healthier will decrease your chances of developing blood vessel disorders that will lead to tinnitus.

Tinnitus is a serious symptom of a medical condition, disorder or disease. It causes ringing, buzzing and other phantom noises that only you can hear. You want to determine the cause of the symptom as soon as possible. Contact your physician to find out if you have tinnitus and what specific treatments are available to you to decrease your symptoms.