

EAR, NOSE, THROAT & ALLERGY CENTER
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TINNITUS

What is Tinnitus?

Many people suffer from tinnitus or head noises. It can be a sound that is intermittent or constant and annoying one or both ears. Its pitch can go from a low roar to a high squeal or whine. Prior to any treatment it is important to go through a thorough examination and evaluation. An essential part of treatment is to understand tinnitus and the causes.

What causes tinnitus?

Most of tinnitus is caused by damage to the microscopic endings of the hearing nerve in the inner ear. Injury to the nerve of hearing can cause hearing loss and often tinnitus. If you are older, advancing age is generally accompanied by a certain amount of hearing nerve impairment and tinnitus. If you are younger, exposure to loud noises is probably the leading cause of tinnitus, and often damages hearing as well.

There are many causes of tinnitus. Some causes are not serious such as a plug of wax in the ear canal. Tinnitus can also be a symptom of stiffening of the middle ear bones, which is known as otosclerosis

Tinnitus may also be caused by allergy, high or low blood pressure, a tumor, TMJ, diabetes, thyroid problems injury to the head or neck and a variety of other causes including medications such as anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, sedatives, antidepressants and aspirin. Treatment will be quite different in each case of tinnitus. It is important to investigate the cause of tinnitus so that the best treatment can be determined.

How is tinnitus treated?

In most cases of tinnitus, there is no specific treatment for ear and head noises. If a specific cause of the tinnitus is determined there may be a way to eliminate the noise. But, determination may involve balance tests, MRI's, hearing tests and lab work. However, most causes cannot be identified. Other treatment options include:

- Alternative treatments
- Amplification with hearing aids
- Cochlear implants or electrical stimulation
- Cognitive therapy
- Sound therapy
- TMJ treatment

How to cope with tinnitus

Concentration and relaxation exercises can help to control muscle groups and circulation throughout the body. The increased relaxation and circulation achieved by these exercises can reduce the intensity of tinnitus in some patients.

Masking out the head noise with a competing sound at a constant low level, such as a ticking clock or radio static (white noise). Tinnitus is generally more bothersome in quiet surroundings. Products that generate white noise are available through catalogs and specialty stores.

Hearing aids may reduce head noise while you are wearing them and sometimes cause the noise to go away temporarily. It is important not to set the hearing aid to loud as this can worsen the tinnitus in some cases. A trial of the hearing aid for up to one month is advisable if your primary purpose is relief of the tinnitus.

Tinnitus maskers can be combined within hearing aids. They emit a competitive but pleasant sound that can distract you from head noise. Some people find that a tinnitus masker may even suppress the head noise for several hours after it is used, but this is not true for all users.

Tips to decrease the severity of tinnitus

- Avoid exposure to loud noises
- Check your blood pressure. If it is high get it under control
- Decrease your intake of salt. Salt impairs blood circulation
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea, cola and tobacco
- Exercise daily to improve your circulation
- Get adequate rest and avoid fatigue
- Stop worrying about the noise. Recognize your head noise as an annoyance and learn to ignore it as much as possible