

Tinnitus

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus (TIN-ih-tus) is a sound you may hear when there is not sound coming from a source outside your body. It is not usually a serious condition, but it can be annoying. It may sound like a ringing, buzzing, or clicking inside your head. When it is very quiet, tinnitus can seem louder because there are no other sounds to drown it out.

What does it sound like?

The pitch of tinnitus can range from high to low. It can occur for a few seconds or all the time. You might have trouble hearing or notice that loud noises bother you. Tinnitus may seem louder or more annoying at night when you are trying to fall asleep or when you are under stress. Sometimes moving your jaw or head in a certain way makes it sound louder or softer.

What causes it?

The most common cause of tinnitus is hearing loss. When people begin to lose their hearing, the hearing part of the brain does not receive normal sound input. The brain begins to sense sound that is not there, causing tinnitus.

Certain medicines can also cause tinnitus. Ask your doctor if you are taking any that might cause or worsen tinnitus. Less common causes of tinnitus include muscle strain in your neck or jaw, a condition called Meniere (men-YAIR) disease that affects hearing and balance, and vestibular schwannoma (ves-TIB-yoo-lur shwa-NO-muh), which is a growth on the nerves in the ear.

Your doctor will take your history and do an exam to find out what is causing your tinnitus. You will likely need a hearing test. Other tests may include magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or tests of your inner ear.

Will my tinnitus go away?

Most cases of tinnitus last only a few minutes. Even when tinnitus lasts longer than that, it often goes away without treatment. If you have hearing loss or if you are older than 50 years, tinnitus is more likely to stay or get worse over time. There are some treatments that can help with tinnitus if it lasts a long time. Ask your doctor what treatment is best for you.



Tinnitus *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

American Academy of Audiology
800-AAA-2336 (800-222-2336)
<http://www.audiology.org>

American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck
Surgery
703-836-4444
<http://www.entnet.org>

American Tinnitus Association
800-634-8978
<http://www.ata.org>

Hear USA
800-700-3277
<http://www.hearusa.com>

National Institute on Deafness and Other
Communication Disorders
800-241-1044
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov>

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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