

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. Tell your doctor if you notice a sound you think might be tinnitus.

What does it sound like?

The pitch of tinnitus can range from high to low. In most cases, it sounds like a ringing, buzzing, or clicking inside your head. For some people, it sounds like a whooshing or pulsing. When you are in a quiet place, tinnitus can seem louder because there are no other sounds to drown it out. 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?

Tinnitus is most commonly associated with hearing loss. It is thought that 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, resulting in 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 ask you questions about your tinnitus and do an exam to find out what might be causing it. You will likely need a hearing test. Other tests are rarely needed, but may include magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or tests of your inner ear.

Will the tinnitus go away?

Most cases of tinnitus last only a few minutes. Even when tinnitus lasts longer than that, in many cases it goes away without treatment. If you have hearing loss or if you are older than 50 years, tinnitus is

continues



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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 <https://familydoctor.org>.

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Tinnitus *(continued)*

more likely to stay or get worse over time. There are some treatments that may help reduce the discomfort of tinnitus if it lasts a long time. Ask your doctor what treatment is best for you.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Audiology
<https://www.audiology.org>

American Academy of Otolaryngology–
Head and Neck Surgery
<https://www.entnet.org>

American Tinnitus Association
<https://www.ata.org>

HearUSA
<https://www.hearusa.com>

National Institute on Deafness and Other
Communication Disorders
<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov>

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