



Your introductory guide to tinnitus



Tinnitus or “ringing in the ears” can be an occasional annoyance for some but a constant frustration for others. Whatever the level of your tinnitus, it is possible to gain some relief.

Tinnitus is a very personal condition. The key is to work with your hearing care professional to develop an individualized treatment plan. This may include the use of hearing aid technology, alongside expert guidance to help you better understand and cope with the noise in your head.

There is a maze of tinnitus information and “cures”, which is sometimes confusing to know what is relevant or even true. This booklet will help you understand more about your tinnitus and guide you through the proven tinnitus management approaches.



What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is a medical condition that causes someone to perceive or "hear" sound that is not present in the environment around them. Although this sound is most often described as a "ringing in the ears" it could actually be any type of sound, including whooshing, hissing, chirping or whistling.

How common is it?

Tinnitus is common in our society. It is experienced by 10% – 15% of the population. The incidence of tinnitus increases with age, one in five people between 55 and 65 years old report some tinnitus symptoms.¹

¹ Langguth B. et al. (2013), Lancet Neurol., vol. 12, December, pp. 920-930

Did you know...
1 in 10 adults has tinnitus?



Tinnitus and hearing loss

The precise cause of tinnitus is not yet fully understood, however, it is generally accepted that tinnitus is a side effect of damage to a person's auditory (hearing) system. 80% of people with tinnitus also have a hearing loss. In some cases this loss is so mild that the person does not even know it exists.

Reduced hearing, due to auditory damage, is thought to cause increased activity within the auditory system. The brain may turn up the sounds it can hear to compensate for the hearing loss; the result is a perceived sound heard only by the person.

There is not one specific trigger to tinnitus, however, in many cases there is a link to events or conditions unrelated to hearing. For example, people report being first aware of their tinnitus after a stressful time, or illness. People also report that their tinnitus can vary according to their diet. For example alcohol, nicotine and caffeine can increase tinnitus. It is also important to note that certain medications can either cause or influence the level of tinnitus. Please consult your doctor if you are unsure.



Possible treatment methods

Together with your hearing care professional you will develop a personal tinnitus management plan tailored to your hearing, tinnitus and lifestyle needs.

Your tinnitus management plan will center around providing information about your tinnitus and how best to manage it, along with the use of devices to gain control over your tinnitus. The eventual goal is that you are able to enjoy life again without the annoyance of tinnitus.

Hearing devices

When treating tinnitus, several different types of devices exist:

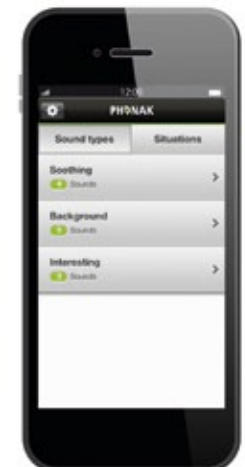
- Hearing aids: discreet modern devices that are scientifically proven to provide tinnitus relief.
- Masker: small devices that generate sound to "mask" or distract you from your tinnitus.
- Combination devices: hearing aids that also include a noise generator or "masking" function.
- Tinnitus Apps: smartphone apps that provide further sound options and/or the possibility of customizing your own library of sounds and music.



Phonak Tinnitus Balance Portfolio

The Phonak Tinnitus Balance Portfolio is a set of tools designed by Phonak, the world-leading manufacturer of hearing solutions, to help in the management of tinnitus. Phonak recognizes the individual nature of tinnitus and this portfolio has been designed to meet whatever your hearing, tinnitus and lifestyle needs may be.

- Phonak hearing aids: the wide range of hearing aids that support tinnitus management ensures that there is a suitable solution for your hearing and tinnitus.
- Phonak Tinnitus Balance noise generator: a feature that offers additional distraction from your tinnitus through the use of noise.
- Tinnitus Balance App: use this smartphone app to customize your own library of in-ear sounds and/or music.



The principle behind tinnitus management

The aim of tinnitus management is to help you focus less on your tinnitus and so provide you with relief. One way to do this is to provide additional sounds so that the tinnitus is less noticeable.

To help explain the benefit of using sound to manage tinnitus, a visual analogy can be used. Tinnitus is represented by the brightness of the light from a street lamp.



In the evening, the light emanating from the street lamp is very prominent due to the lack of other light sources.



In comparison, if the street lamp is on during the day, the light is much less noticeable due to the presence of daylight.

In the case of tinnitus, adding external sound has a similar effect – by enriching the sound environment with hearing aids the listeners are no longer focused on their tinnitus.

Benefits of relaxation

For many people there is a strong link between how much they are bothered by their tinnitus and their overall stress level.

Relaxation decreases the effects of stress on your mind and body. Therefore, relaxation techniques are a useful way of helping you cope with both everyday stress and stress-related health issues such as tinnitus.

People find relaxation in different ways, generally speaking, relaxation involves refocusing your attention on something calming. It doesn't really matter which technique you choose what matters is that you practice it regularly to reap its ongoing benefits.

Something as simple as taking a 5-minute break from your daily activities to practice some deep breathing can help your body relax and divert attention from your tinnitus.

Additional information on relaxation techniques can be found on:

- www.tinnitus.org.uk/relaxation
- www.ata.org/coping-with-tinnitus-an-overview



What to expect during your first visit

Your hearing care professional is trained and experienced in helping tinnitus patients and offering different tinnitus management options. The aim of your first appointment is to better understand your hearing and tinnitus. You may be asked to fill out a questionnaire prior to the appointment. You may experience the following at your first visit:

- Introductory tinnitus discussion
- Tinnitus and hearing assessment
- Full explanation of your tinnitus and hearing situation
- Discussion of your tinnitus management options

Useful links and sources for further information

For more information on tinnitus, please refer to the following organizations and websites:

- American Tinnitus Association: www.ata.org
- British Tinnitus Association: www.tinnitus.org.uk
- Phonak: www.phonak.com/tinnitus

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