



## TINNITUS

### What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is defined as a consistent noise heard in the ear in the absence of an external source of sound. Tinnitus may come and go, or it may be a continuous sound. It can vary in pitch from a low roar to a high squeal or whine, and it can affect one or both ears. When the ringing is constant, it can be annoying and distracting.

### What causes tinnitus?

Most tinnitus comes from damage to the microscopic endings of the hearing nerve in the inner ear. The health of these nerve endings is important for acute hearing, and injury to them brings on 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 noise can lead to tinnitus, and it often damages hearing as well.

Other causes include:

- A small plug of wax in the ear canal causing temporary tinnitus
- Stiffening of the middle ear bones, a condition referred to as otosclerosis
- Allergies, high or low blood pressure (blood circulation problems), a tumor (acoustic neuroma), diabetes, thyroid problems, or injury to the head or neck
- Medications such as NSAIDs, antibiotics, sedatives, or antidepressants. If you take aspirin and your ears ring, talk to your doctor about dosage in relation to your size.

### What is the treatment?

In most cases, there is no specific treatment for tinnitus. If your Ear, Nose, and Throat physician finds a specific cause of your tinnitus, he/she may be able to eliminate the noise. However, this determination may require extensive testing including hearing test, imaging (e.g. MRI Brain), balance tests, and blood work. Most causes, unfortunately, cannot be identified. Occasionally, medicine helps decrease the noise. The medications used are varied, and several may be tried to see if they help.

### What can I do to manage my tinnitus?

- Avoid exposure to loud noises, and use hearing protection
- Monitor your blood pressure
- Decrease your intake of salt
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea, soda, and tobacco
- Get adequate rest, exercise regularly, and eat a balanced diet

### What can help me 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- Tinnitus is usually more bothersome in quiet environments. A competing sound at a constant low level, such as a clock ticking, radio static, or other products that generate white noise may mask the tinnitus and make it less noticeable.
- Hearing Aids- If you are a hearing aid user, hearing aids may be programmed to emit a competitive but pleasant sound that can distract you from your tinnitus. It is important not to set the hearing aid at excessively loud levels, as this can worsen the tinnitus in some cases.