

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 is probably the leading cause of tinnitus, and often damages hearing as well.

What is the treatment of tinnitus?

In most cases, there is no specific treatment for noises in the ear or head. If an otolaryngologist finds on examination that your tinnitus has a specific cause, he/she may be able to remove the cause and thus eliminate or reduce the noise. This investigation may require a fairly extensive workup including x-rays, balance testing, and laboratory work. **However, most causes of tinnitus cannot be identified.** Occasionally, medicines or vitamins may help the noise even though no cause can be identified. Although these products can be prescribed or at times commercially advertised, the patient must realize that the outcome of such treatments are variable and what benefits one individual may not necessarily benefit another.

When there is no identifiable cause, can something be done to lessen the tinnitus?

Yes, the following list of do's and don'ts can help lessen the severity of tinnitus:

- Avoid exposure to loud sounds and noises.
- Get your blood pressure checked; if it is high, seek your doctor's help to get it under control.
- Decrease your intake of salt (which impairs good blood circulation). Avoid salty foods and do not add salt to your food in cooking or at the table.
- Avoid nerve stimulants such as coffee and soft drinks, tobacco, and marijuana.
- Exercise daily. This improves your circulation.
- Get adequate rest and avoid over fatigue.
- Stop worrying about the noise. (Some studies suggest that tinnitus may be associated with the limbic system which controls emotion. When tinnitus occurs and the patient becomes annoyed, he/she becomes upset and therefore the tinnitus may become more recognizable, creating a vicious cycle).
- Reduce nervous anxiety, which may increase stress on an already tense hearing system.