

# Tinnitus Explained



## IS THE RINGING IN MY EARS NORMAL? (ALSO KNOWN AS TINNITUS)

Tinnitus is the name for these head noises, and they are common. Nearly 36 million Canadians suffer from this discomfort.

- Tinnitus may come and go, or you may be aware of a continuous sound. It can be mild, but for some it is debilitating.
- It can vary in pitch from a low roar to a high squeal or whine, and you may hear it in one or both ears.
- When the ringing is constant, it can be annoying and distracting.
- Tinnitus is most often noticed when the environment is quiet.

## WHAT CAUSES TINNITUS?

There are many causes for "subjective tinnitus," the noise only you can hear.

### Hearing Loss:

The prime cause of tinnitus is hearing loss. Testing your hearing regularly is important and strategies can be discussed. If tinnitus is a result of hearing loss it can be addressed by treating the hearing loss itself since it is related to the damage to the hearing structures of the ear.

### Noise Exposure:

Loud noise in the workplace, at a sporting event or music concert or noisy hobby can result in tinnitus. Tinnitus is also the most common service-related disability among veterans due to gunfire, loud machinery and bomb blasts.

### Medications:

Tinnitus can be a side effect of taking certain medications, particularly in high doses. It is important to talk to your doctor since dosage could be adjusted under medical guidance. Examples of these include anti-inflammatories, antibiotics, sedatives, antidepressants and aspirin.

### Earwax or Ear Infection:

Blockage of the ear canal by earwax or by fluid from an ear infection can cause tinnitus.

### Head and Neck Injuries:

Car accidents, whiplash, walking gait leading to falls can damage structures of the ear causing tinnitus.

### Jaw Alignment/TMJ:

Recent dental work, jaw misalignment, grinding of teeth can all contribute to tinnitus.

### Chronic Health Conditions:

Tinnitus may also be caused by allergies, high or low blood pressure (blood circulation problems), diabetes, thyroid problems.

## ARE THERE ANY TREATMENTS FOR TINNITUS?

### Tips that help lessen the severity of tinnitus:

- Avoid exposure to loud sounds and noises.
- Check blood pressure (if it is high, talk to your doctor).
- Decrease your intake of salt (salt impairs blood circulation).
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea, cola, and tobacco.
- Exercise daily to improve your circulation.
- Get adequate rest and avoid fatigue.
- Protect your ears from further noise exposure or hearing damage.
- Background music, noise, tv to distract from head noise – set a timer for them to turn off after falling asleep.

### Ask an Audiologist about specific strategies that are best for YOU:

- Hearing Aids (test for hearing loss)
- Tinnitus maskers (a small, electronic instrument)
- Biofeedback (concentration/relaxation exercises)
- Educational awareness

Though there may not be a specific 'cure' (unless it is related to a physical issue causing tinnitus), it can be addressed in ways that reduce the frustration and are less debilitating and manageable.

Talk to an Audiologist.