

TINNITUS

This leaflet has been produced by the British Tinnitus Association in collaboration with the Scottish Tinnitus Audiology Group.

Freephone helpline:

0800 018 0527

tinnitus.org.uk

info@tinnitus.org.uk



(T)

**British Tinnitus
Association**

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about tinnitus - a sound you hear inside your head or ears when there is no matching outside sound.

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is a sound you hear inside your head or ears.

- Sometimes it's buzzing or ringing, sometimes people hear a whooshing or humming sound
- It can be constant or it can come and go
- It can occur in one ear or both



- Sometimes it keeps time with your heartbeat or some other rhythm. This is called pulsatile tinnitus
- Occasionally people have tinnitus that is musical, often snatches of a familiar tune or song. This is known as musical tinnitus or musical hallucination

Tinnitus can affect anyone at any time. Some people hardly notice it, but others find it upsetting. There are things you can do to help prevent it, and to treat it if it does happen.

In most cases, tinnitus improves or even goes away with time because the brain 'forgets' it's listening to the sound.



What causes it?

The brain listens to all the sounds going on around us and then decides which ones it wants us to listen to. Normally it ignores all the sounds that are not important - clocks ticking, for example, or traffic. Have you noticed how some people who live under aeroplane flight paths or next to busy roads don't seem to notice the noise? That's because their brains are familiar with listening to these particular noises so they just ignore them until the noises become unimportant.

It's called **habituation**.



When something new happens the brain has to think about that instead. Perhaps we're worried about something or we've got a problem with our hearing. While the brain is figuring out what's happened, it sometimes forgets to cancel out sounds or it focuses on certain noises by mistake. Sometimes silence makes tinnitus worse, for other people noisy environments trigger their tinnitus.

30%

of people will experience tinnitus at some point...

Is it common?

Yes! About 30% of people will experience tinnitus at some point in their lives. About 10% of people will have persistent tinnitus.

Am I going deaf?

No! Tinnitus is sometimes caused by your ears being blocked by a cold or ear wax, but it doesn't cause deafness. If you think one of these is your problem, see your doctor and you can decide which treatment is best for you. Some people may have tinnitus because they have been exposed to a lot of loud noise, which can damage hearing. It is a good idea to use ear protection in noisy places to help prevent this damage.

Is there a cure?

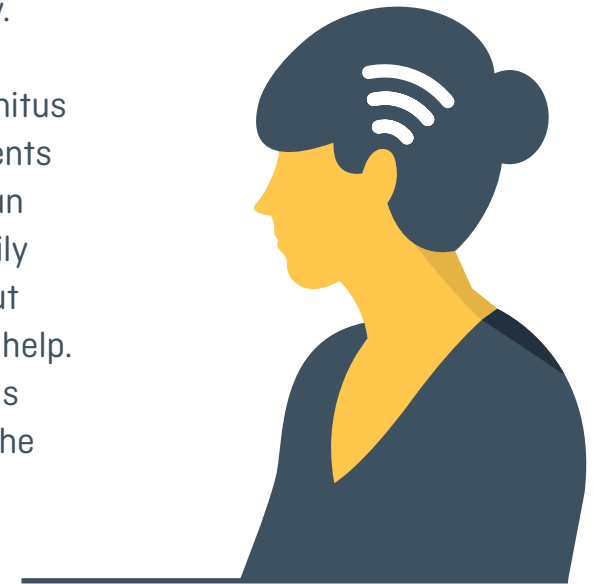
Because tinnitus isn't a disease, there isn't a 'cure', but there are lots of things you can do to make it better or even encourage it to go away.

Because everyone's tinnitus is different, the treatments are different too. You can talk to your doctor, family and friends and work out what things would best help. For most people, tinnitus goes away by itself as the brain habituates.

Do I need a hearing aid?

Hearing loss is a common factor behind tinnitus. Many people wrongly assume that it is their tinnitus, rather than their hearing loss, that is causing hearing difficulties. The aim of fitting a hearing aid is to correct any such hearing loss, with the possibility that this may reduce the tinnitus.

Want to know more? Ask for the BTA leaflet "Hearing aids and tinnitus"



MUSIC CAN HELP!

Can I train my brain to ignore the tinnitus?

Sometimes a quiet noise in the background can help encourage your brain to listen to something other than the tinnitus. This could perhaps be a fan, the radio, or music. Whatever you choose, make sure you play it at a quieter level than your tinnitus so your brain can choose to listen to the more interesting sound instead of the tinnitus.



Want to know more? Ask for the BTA leaflet "Sound therapy"

My tinnitus gets worse under stress

If you've had a hard day at work, at home or at college, are having problems with friends or family or are worried about problems in your life, tinnitus can seem worse.

Stress is experienced by nearly everyone at various times in their lives and happens when the demands on you are not being met by your resources.

Learning to relax - perhaps by doing some breathing exercises or finding a quiet place to think or listen to a little quiet music - can help.

Want to know more? Ask for the BTA leaflets "Tinnitus and stress", "Ideas for relaxation without sound" and "Relaxation"



RELAX

I can't sleep

It may be that the move from a relatively noisy daytime environment to the quietness of your bedroom makes your tinnitus more noticeable.

Doing something quiet before you go to bed, like reading a book, may help your brain prepare for sleep.

Learning to relax properly is one of the best ways to help yourself. Focusing on your breathing by breathing slowly in and out to a count of 3 is simple and can be done anywhere at anytime.

[Want to know more?](#)

[Ask for the BTA leaflet](#)

["Tinnitus and sleep disturbance"](#)



What else can I do?

Keeping relaxed, fit and healthy will encourage your brain to listen to more interesting sounds. In most cases tinnitus settles down and goes away naturally.

Even if it doesn't go away, it will get better as time goes on, as your brain learns how to manage it.

For further information

We hope that you have found this leaflet helpful. The health professionals involved in your care will be happy to answer any questions you may have about your tinnitus.

Here are some more self-directed resources that are free to access.

**The BTA have a vision:
a world where no one
suffers from tinnitus.**

The British Tinnitus Association (BTA) are also here to help and support you. We know there are tools and methods that mean some people won't "suffer" from their tinnitus. However, we also want to find better ways to manage tinnitus – and a cure!

We offer support and information to people with tinnitus, their friends, family and carers in a number of different ways:

- Freephone helpline
- Email support
- Website
- Information leaflets
- Take on Tinnitus
- Online forum
- Tinnitus support groups

Our helpline and email support

Our friendly advisers have many years of experience in talking to people with tinnitus over the phone or via email, and you can speak in confidence. No question or worry is too big or too small for us to answer!

0800 018 0527

Monday-Friday 9am-5pm
(excluding bank holidays)

info@tinnitus.org.uk

Our website

Our website is probably the biggest single source of tinnitus information on the internet. We work hard to make sure that it is up to date and that the information is correct and backed by experts. We have sections on living with tinnitus as well as research news, details of events and support groups and an online shop with products to help you.

tinnitus.org.uk

Our information leaflets

We have a range of 36 leaflets on tinnitus and other conditions, including leaflets for children. We offer them all in large print, and some are available in audio. Four of our leaflets are in Easy Read format with simple text and illustrations.

Our leaflets carry the Information Standard logo, which means we have been independently assessed to check that the information we produce is clear, correct and up to date.

Take on tinnitus

takeontinnitus.co.uk is our new website aimed at people who have just begun to experience tinnitus – although it's suitable for anyone at any stage of living with it. Developed with tinnitus experts and

e-learning specialists, **takeontinnitus.co.uk** starts with a taster session and has seven short learning modules with a range of interactive exercises, video clips and self-tests.

Our online forum

Our online forum is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer you support from other people with tinnitus.

healthunlocked.com/bta

Tinnitus support groups

Groups are run by people who are living with tinnitus, and many people find that the personal contact and sharing experiences are very useful. We can put you in touch with your nearest one, or visit our website **tinnitus.org.uk**

Hospital details

This leaflet is for information purposes only. If you need further support, please speak to your GP regarding a referral to local services.

References

A list of the references used in writing this leaflet is available on request.

This leaflet has been produced by the British Tinnitus Association in collaboration with the Scottish Tinnitus Audiology Group and conforms to the Principles and Requirements of the Information Standard.

© British Tinnitus Association.
Version 1.0 Issued May 2017.
To be reviewed May 2020.

