

Adult Hearing Services - Tinnitus

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is an awareness of sound that is not caused by an external sound source. It may be heard in one ear, both ears, in the head or may be difficult to locate.

These sounds may be constant or come and go. Some people initially wonder where the sound is coming from only to later discover that it's internal.

You may have heard tinnitus referred to as a 'ringing in the ears'. However tinnitus can be any sound. Often people will describe their tinnitus as a whooshing, buzzing, ringing, hissing, whistling or it may resemble speech. For others, the sound may be constantly changing.

Occasionally people have tinnitus that has a musical quality and can seem like a familiar tune or song. This generally occurs in people with a hearing loss who have a strong musical interest. This type of tinnitus is known as music tinnitus but will sometimes be referred to as 'musical hallucination'.

Who gets tinnitus?

Tinnitus is extremely common: approximately one in ten people experience some degree of tinnitus. In most people it does not interfere with their daily lives.

Anyone can experience tinnitus. However those with a hearing loss or who have had loud noise exposure may be more likely to notice it.

Research shows that most people will notice some tinnitus when in a silent room.

What causes tinnitus?

Exactly what causes tinnitus is not fully known. Many scientists believe that tinnitus is generated by random electrical signals that occur in the hearing pathway. These random signals are common and usually we are not aware of them happening. Often something changing can trigger us to become aware of these signals and hear them as tinnitus sounds. This change may be in our mental or physical health and not necessarily related to hearing. Many people report that their tinnitus arrives after periods of stress or a change in circumstance. Once we become aware of the tinnitus it draws the attention of the brain and becomes more noticeable. Tinnitus usually fades over time.

Habituation

When people first experience tinnitus it's natural to be worried or very aware of the new sound as we would any change to our bodies.

Most people find that their tinnitus gradually settles down after this initial period even without them doing anything specific. This is called 'habituation'. It's similar to walking into a room with a noisy fan: after a while you stop noticing it as much even though the sound is still there when you listen for it.

What can we do to help you?

Within Gloucestershire we have several staff who specialise in tinnitus. At a tinnitus appointment we may discuss:

- the possible causes of tinnitus
- triggers which may make your tinnitus more troublesome
- strategies to help you to manage your tinnitus
- the latest tinnitus knowledge and research

Seeing ENT

Tinnitus is rarely an indication of a serious disorder. However if you have concerns do speak to your GP or Audiologist. When you tell us about your tinnitus we'll ask you some questions and examine your ears. In some circumstances it may be necessary to see the ENT doctor for further checks and this would be explained.

What can I do to help myself?

Recognition - Understanding more about tinnitus can make a big difference to how you manage your tinnitus.

Relaxation - Most people find that their tinnitus is less noticeable when they build some 'me-time' into their day. Reducing stress and increasing activity levels can help not only physical and emotional wellbeing but also reduce tinnitus awareness.

Retraining - Tinnitus is often more noticeable in a quiet environment. Having a bit of quiet background sound can help reduce the impact of your tinnitus e.g. by having the radio or TV on very quietly in the background or using a tinnitus app.

Phone app for tinnitus

There are many apps available that can help with your tinnitus, and often those with tinnitus also find mindfulness apps useful.

One free app is the 'GN Resound Tinnitus Relief App'

www.resound.com/en-us/hearing-aids/apps/relief

Hearing aids

Although there is no 'cure' for tinnitus, studies have shown that people with hearing loss and tinnitus often benefit from the use of a hearing aid. The hearing aid gives them an increased awareness of the natural sounds around them which reduces the impact of the tinnitus when the hearing aid is worn consistently.

British Tinnitus Association

You can find additional information, support and advice on the British Tinnitus Association. The British Tinnitus Association also runs support groups and has an online shop.

www.tinnitus.org.uk

Contact details

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