

# Tinnitus- A constant ringing in the ears

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Tinnitus is the technical name given to constant ringing in the ears and is a fairly common condition affecting up to 20 % of the population. This maddening noise, called tinnitus, can range in volume from a ring to a roar. It ranges in severity and for some can become so severe that it interferes with normal life, impacting on work, sleep, and normal communication with others. Despite its commonness, a lot of the time the reason someone is suffering from tinnitus is poorly understood and often speculative.

Tinnitus isn't a disease in itself, but a symptom of another problem. Examples are:

- Ear wax blocking the ear canals.
- Food allergies.
- Reactions to medications.
- Middle-ear trauma or infections.
- Blood vessel abnormalities in the brain.
- Ear nerve damage due to exposure to loud noise.
- Anemia.
- Meniere's disease.
- Diabetes.
- Brain tumors (rarely).

Many factors can increase the severity of tinnitus and these include high blood pressure, viruses, high uric acid levels, cigarette smoking, antibiotics, coffee or caffeine intake and salt intake. And sometimes, tinnitus is due simply to advancing age and often accompanies loss of hearing. Generally tinnitus is temporary and will not lead to deafness. Successful treatment is aimed at finding and treating the problem that causes the tinnitus.

A lot of the time those who have been suffering from tinnitus have lower levels of B12, folic acid and zinc and supplementation has been shown to be helpful for such patients. The link between tinnitus and low zinc levels is even stronger in elderly persons. It is also very common for them to suffer from sleep disturbances making them feel continually fatigued either all day or on waking. Other nutritional deficiencies associated with tinnitus or those which have proved helpful include manganese, magnesium, antioxidants, vitamin B3, vitamin E, vitamin C, essential fatty acids and anti-inflammatory agents such as quercetin. Zinc and vitamin A are essential for adequate functioning of the organs involved in hearing and the prevention of hearing loss.

Herbal medicine also has an important role to play. It is common for those with tinnitus to have poor circulation and poor blood flow to the ears which can result in ringing in the ears. Herbs and nutrients which improve circulation and oxygenation such as ginkgo, CoQ10 and dimethylglycine are useful in such circumstances. Decreasing inflammation is also important and anti-inflammatory herbs and nutrients are used to achieve this safely without the risk of negative side effects.

Addressing contributing factors is essential in eliminating the triggers for tinnitus. Stress is not a direct cause of tinnitus, but it will generally make an already existing case worse thus measures need to be employed to manage stress levels. Similar to stress, a poor diet can worsen an existing case of tinnitus. Alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, quinine/tonic water, high fat, high sodium can all make tinnitus worse in some people. Furthermore treating any allergies or chemical sensitivities has shown to alleviate tinnitus too.

Excessive noise exposure or over stimulation can generate an excessive amount of free radicals which can lead to significant damage to the sensory cells and produce deafness. Antioxidants are essentially in minimizing the damage free radicals are able to exert and are vital for cell protection. Any build up of excess earwax can be safely treated with a gentle, non-invasive treatment known as ear candling. This process involves using specific candles to help create a vacuum in the ear, drawing out any excess wax.

Great success in eliminating symptoms has been provided to those who are able to address the initial reasons for their tinnitus symptoms. An individually prescribed treatment program provides the most significant benefits as causative agents are eliminated rather than a masking of symptoms. Decreasing the damage done to your hearing from excessive noise exposure can be obtained with certain nutritional agents and can help with tinnitus. Balancing sensitivities, reducing inflammation, decreasing congestion and providing immune support are all actions that can successfully be implemented to help cure your tinnitus.

## **Self-Care Tips for Tinnitus**

- Relaxation techniques can help you calm down and concentrate, shifting your attention away from the tinnitus. Relaxation can help to reduce stress, which can aggravate tinnitus.
- Exercise regularly to promote good blood circulation.
- Limit your intake of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and aspirin.
- Wear earplugs when exposed to loud noises such as heavy machinery, concerts etc., to prevent damage to the ear.
- Consume a diet rich in healthy, nutrient dense whole foods. Fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grain carbohydrates, nuts, seeds and essential fatty acids.
- Avoid coffee, cola beverages containing caffeine, chocolate, cocoa beans and alcohol. All of these substances tend to increase the uric acid levels in your body which has been associated with tinnitus.
- Limit your salt intake.
- Avoid cigarette smoke as nicotine constricts blood vessels and may be a major cause of your symptoms.
- If the noises started during or after traveling in an airplane, try pinching your nostrils and blowing through your nose. Chewing gum or sucking on hard candy may help prevent the popping and ringing sounds in the ear from happening when you do fly. Also, it is prudent to avoid flying when you have an upper respiratory tract or ear infection.
- Avoid or seek alternatives for medications known to be high in salicylates such as aspirin and NSAIDS as these can sometimes contribute to tinnitus. Others to check are gentamycin and cis-platinum.
- Increase your intake of filtered water. Avoid tonic water; it contains quinine which is known to increase the risk of tinnitus.