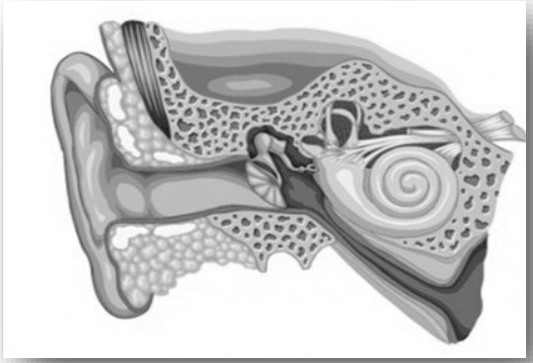
ENT Associates

Making sense of your family's hearing, sinus and throat problems

Tinnitus

Tinnitus is any sound perceived in the ears or head when no external sound is the cause. It can manifest as a ringing, hissing, chirping or any other sensation of sound. It may be intermittent or constant and can vary in pitch and intensity. Over 99.9% of the time, only the person that has tinnitus is aware of the condition.



Tinnitus affects nearly 25 million Americans, an estimated 7 million of whom correlate the condition to a significant impairment in their quality of life.

What causes tinnitus?

The brain wants constant input from the ears. If there is even a slight hearing loss, the brain may begin creating a sound to compensate for what it is not receiving, which is why your doctor will usually recommend a hearing test if you have not already had one recently. Other causes of tinnitus include:

- Pathologic conditions of the ear: infections, tumors (acoustic neuroma), Meniere's disease, otosclerosis, ear drum perforation.
- Drug reactions/side effects: Aspirin, NSAIDs (ibuprofen/naproxen), caffeine, MSG, nicotine, alcohol.
- Head injuries, cervical spine degeneration.
- Systemic diseases: Arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure.

Is curing my tinnitus possible?

If a cause for your tinnitus can be identified, treating it may lead to resolution. However, in many circumstances and despite extensive testing, the exact cause of your tinnitus may not be able to be determined. Your doctor will then advise you on ways to help reduce the amount the tinnitus is affecting your quality of life. Some factors that may be suggested include:

- Masking sounds: Tinnitus is usually worse in more quiet surroundings. A competing sound at a constant low level (ticking clock/radio static/white noise generator) may make the tinnitus less noticeable.
- Hearing aids: if your tinnitus is associated with hearing loss, a hearing aid may reduce tinnitus as well as allow you to hear better. Our doctors of audiology can counsel you on how to choose the best hearing aid to meet your needs.
- Avoid exposure to loud sounds/ noises and wear hearing protection.
- Avoid stimulants such as coffee, tea, cola, and tobacco.
- Exercise daily.
- Decrease your salt intake and if you have high blood pressure, see your primary care doctor.
- Reduce | avoid alcohol.
- Stop worrying about the noise: Recognize your head noise as an annoyance.
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) can help control muscle groups and circulation throughout the body.
- Alternative/complementary/ homeopathic remedies: the effectiveness of these strategies have only been studied in very few cases. Results show that these therapies help a person's general well-being thus eliminating the focus on their head noise.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy may help certain patients.

What else should I know about tinnitus?

People frequently wake up in the night with loud tinnitus. The auditory system never shuts off, even during sleep, so the tinnitus becomes more perceptible in quiet environments, like a bedroom.

(continued on back)

It is common for patients to believe they cannot hear because their tinnitus is so loud. In fact, it's the opposite. The tinnitus is so loud because of the hearing loss. The brain creates a signal to compensate for what it's not receiving.

Nearly 90% of people with tinnitus have hearing loss. Sometimes, the loss may not be perceptible or show up on a hearing test. This is because the loss is in a range *beyond* what shows up on a standard hearing test. It's known as an extended high frequency hearing loss.

Online Resources

If you have further questions or concerns regarding tinnitus, we encourage you to visit the American Tinnitus Association's website at **www.ata.org**. This website provides additional information and support for tinnitus sufferers.

HEARING AIDS & TINNITUS MASKERS

The term "masker" is somewhat misleading in that you don't actually mask or cover up tinnitus. It's really about tricking the brain to ignore it. Since hearing aids amplify soft environmental sounds, they frequently decrease or eliminate the perception of tinnitus in the wearer. If amplification alone does not provide tinnitus relief then a sound can be played through the hearing aid that distracts the brain from listening to the tinnitus. If patients have normal hearing, they can be fit with hearing aids that have no amplification but DO play an extra sound. The sound is tailored to the frequency range of the tinnitus. Since the "masking sound" is not being created by the brain, the brain deems it unimportant and ignores it. The tinnitus mixes in with the masking stimulus, and the brain ignores the tinnitus too.

SOUND MACHINES

Flooding the brain with soft sounds increases input to the auditory cortex in the temporal lobe, which may also decrease tinnitus perception, especially when sleeping. Listening to complex signals during sleep (music, TV, radio) keeps the brain active and adversely affects sleep. Sound machines are a better option. When not sleeping, any soft background noise or music may keep the brain from focusing on the tinnitus sound.

SCAN ME

For office address and contact information:

Clearwater
Countryside
Dunedin
Facial Aesthetics Center
Largo
Port Richey
Spring Hill
St. Petersburg (4th)
St. Petersburg (MLK)
Tampa (Westchase)
Trinity