

Tinnitus Management Strategies

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus describes any sound that is heard, but not caused by an external sound source.

Tinnitus can be heard in many different ways.

It can sound like ringing, buzzing, crickets or rushing. It can develop gradually over time or suddenly. Tinnitus is very common. Most people experience it at some time during their lives.

Tinnitus is not a disease. It is usually a symptom of a problem somewhere within the auditory (hearing) system. If not well managed, tinnitus can become very invasive in one's life. It can cause symptoms of anxiety and depression, stress, feelings of helplessness, fatigue, frustration and irritability.

If you have noticed tinnitus, you should make an appointment for a hearing test. This will help identify if there is a treatable cause, rule out any sinister cause of your tinnitus and provide peace of mind.

At Gippsland Audiology we take a detailed history, assess your hearing and provide detailed feedback as to the possible cause of your tinnitus. From this information we are able to recommend specific management strategies to relieve your tinnitus awareness.

Sometimes it is recommended, depending on results, that you are referred to an Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) specialist for further investigation.

Tinnitus management strategies

Although there is no cure for tinnitus, it can be successfully managed with various management strategies. The aim of tinnitus management is to achieve "habituation". This occurs when the tinnitus may still be heard but does not cause distress or have an effect on lifestyle. Most people are able to achieve habituation given time.

Hearing aids

If a hearing loss is present, appropriate use of hearing aids will often greatly reduce tinnitus awareness. Hearing aids amplify external sounds which are otherwise unheard given the hearing loss. This helps mask and divert attention from the tinnitus. The use of hearing aids can also reduce the effort of concentration and straining to hear. This will help relieve the tiredness, anxiety and stress associated with communication difficulties.

Stress management

Stress can significantly increase awareness of one's tinnitus. Reducing sources of stress and using relaxation techniques can prove beneficial.

Sleep management

It is important to get adequate sleep as tiredness and fatigue can aggravate tinnitus and stress. However, do not go to bed before you are tired. If you are still awake after half an hour of trying to get to sleep, get up and do something else. Maintaining a regular sleep pattern is also important.

Diet

A well balanced and salt-reduced diet can help reduce awareness of tinnitus. Low salt foods, sauces and additives should be considered in your cooking (low salt is considered to be less than 120mg/100g).

Medication

Ask your doctor whether any medications you are taking are known to exacerbate or cause tinnitus. If they are, is there an alternative available?

Distraction

Focusing on tinnitus can make it seem louder and therefore more intrusive. By focusing the brain on other thoughts and activities, the tinnitus can seem less noticeable.

Sound enrichment

Many perceive their tinnitus to be louder and more invasive when their environment is quiet, for example, in bed. Introducing noise, such as music (preferably without lyrics) to the environment, can distract your mind from your tinnitus. It can also help to "drown out" your tinnitus.

Stimulants

Caffeine, nicotine and alcohol are all known to exacerbate tinnitus. However, individual sensitivity varies greatly. Try reducing caffeine intake in the afternoon and evening.

Exercise

Regular exercise can help us relax and increase endorphins, hormones which make us happy. It can also help to reduce fatigue and improve sleeping.

What causes tinnitus?

There are many possible causes of tinnitus.

These include:

- Hearing loss
- Noise damage
- Some medications
- Middle and inner ear conditions
- Injury to the ear or head
- Viral infections
- Reduced blood flow to the ear
- Spinal or neck injuries
- Neck pain or arthritis
- Temporomandibular (jaw) joint (TMJ) disorder
- High blood pressure
- Elevated stress levels

Things that may aggravate tinnitus:

- Exposure to excessive noise
- Stress and fatigue
- Some medications
- Alcohol
- Smoking
- Caffeine
- Change in lifestyle

Berwick

48 Kangan Drive

☎ 1300 094 701

Warragul

41 Albert Street

☎ 03 5622 2737

Leongatha

Leongatha Hospital

☎ 03 5667 5531

Morwell

110 Commercial Road

☎ 03 5134 8366

Traralgon

47 Shakespeare Street

☎ 03 5174 5971

Sale

110 MacArthur Street

☎ 03 5144 2600