



# Central West Specialists

## Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

### **TINNITUS**

#### ***I have head noises – what can be done about it?***

##### ***What are head noises?***

The medical word for head noises is TINNITUS, which is the sensation of a noise or noises in your head or in one or both ears – this sensation may be continuous or only some of the time. It is heard by you but usually not by others although in rare case specialists' report hearing it while examining the ear. About one in ten people experience it to some degree. Some fear that it is a sign of insanity. Fortunately it is not. You may find it difficult to accept your tinnitus or to ignore its presence. If so, having tinnitus is probably irritating or distressing for you and you will be looking for ways of relieving this symptom.

##### ***What causes it?***

The cause of your tinnitus needs to be investigated by your doctor, who may make a referral to an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist on your behalf. It is a sign that there is a disturbance along your hearing loss. Tinnitus can occur as a result of exposure to excessive noise, a condition such as anaemia. Many other causes exist although sometimes no cause will be evident.

##### ***Is there a cure?***

Sometimes the underlying disturbance along the hearing pathway or the tinnitus itself can be treated by medication or surgery. However, most people will need to seek relief by other means (see later in this pamphlet).

##### ***What can make it worse?***

##### ***Loud Noises***

Avoid these and wear hearing protection.

##### ***Drugs***

The following drugs can aggravate tinnitus: aspirin, nicotine (smoking), caffeine (e.g. in tea, coffee, coca-cola, chocolate), excessive alcohol, marijuana. If a prescribed drug causes a sudden increase in tinnitus, report it to your doctor. He or she may be able to prescribe a different drug.

##### ***Stress or Fatigue***

These tend to aggravate tinnitus whatever the cause. Many things can help to refresh and relax you, e.g. getting enough rest, controlling stress, etc. You might wish to inquire about these things at our Community Health Centre or to discuss them with your doctor or specialist. They may be able to guide you in this area.

##### ***What can relieve tinnitus and its effects on you?***

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These methods have been used successfully. Find out what works for you and then make a commitment to do these things.

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### ***Tinnitus cont.***

#### ***Wearing a Hearing Aid***

If a hearing impairment accompanies your tinnitus, then wearing a hearing aid may help. A hearing aid amplifies conversational and environmental sounds, which will often mask tinnitus. Concentrating on outside sounds tends to reduce awareness of “internal” sounds.

#### ***Listening to Other Sounds***

Some environmental sounds can mask tinnitus, e.g. the sound of the sea, rain, the noise of a fan or air conditioner, engine noise, the ticking of a loud clock, the radio, music, etc. It can be especially helpful to listen to sounds late at night as it is likely you will be most aware of your sound at that time. If necessary, you can listen to the radio through an earpiece so that others cannot hear it. Some find that the “static” noise produced by a radio off-station can also drown out tinnitus.

#### ***Relaxing***

Relaxing can alleviate tinnitus. Many things can aid relaxation, e.g. relaxation classes, yoga, meditation, etc. Your Community Health Centre, doctor or specialist may be able to suggest something in your area. Make a commitment to spend time relaxing every day. Don't worry about how much time you allocate to this. Find times in which you can comfortably spend in this way. Sleeping with your head on extra high pillows may alleviate tinnitus as it sometimes relieves congestion.

#### ***Looking for New Interests***

Getting involved in an interest or hobby can help to take our mind off the noise(s). Spending time with other people, e.g. family and friends, can help you to think of other things. Interests which encourage your attention to be directed away from your hearing to other senses such as sight, e.g. painting, photography, touch (breadmaking, gardening), may assist.

#### ***Meeting Other People with tinnitus***

This provides opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas about tinnitus. Some places where you can do this are: branches of Australian Association for Better Hearing, the H.E.A.R. Service of East Melbourne (a programme of the Adult Deaf Society, Victoria), some hospitals that have special Tinnitus Clinics and Self Help Groups.

#### ***Looking after your General Health***

A balanced diet and exercise suitable for you will encourage feelings of well being. This helps with tinnitus relief.

#### ***Using Tinnitus Instruments***

These can sometimes help. They can be purchased from a hearing aid dealer. It is recommended that you try any device before you consider buying, as they are expensive. Experiment to find out what works for you and avoid aggravating factors.

