
UNDERSTANDING TINNITUS



What is Tinnitus?

Tinnitus (pronounced tin-NY-tus or TIN-i-tus) is the phenomenon of hearing sound in your ears that no one else can hear. While commonly described as **ringing**, it can also be perceived as **roaring, buzzing, clicking, hissing, humming, pulsing, or beating**.

Tinnitus itself is not a disease, but rather a symptom of a disorder in the auditory system. It may occur in one or both ears, may be or intermittent or constant, and may be associated with or without hearing loss.

A thorough examination and evaluation by an otolaryngologist can help determine the cause and appropriate treatment. Often, a cause cannot be identified.

For about one in five people with tinnitus, it can be so debilitating that it interferes with the ability to hear other sounds, negatively affects job performance, causes insomnia, and provokes anxiety, anger, and depression.

■ What Causes Tinnitus?

Excessive ear wax. A buildup of ear wax can create pressure on the eardrum, affecting how it vibrates and causing tinnitus.

Overexposure to loud noise. The vibrations created by loud noise can damage the hairs in your inner ear. When these hairs are damaged, they don't function properly and can trigger random electrical impulses to your brain, causing tinnitus.

Medications. Aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), benzodiazepines, tricyclic antidepressants, certain antibiotics, beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, certain cancer medications, and proton pump inhibitors, among others, may cause tinnitus. This is a rare side effect and typically stops once you stop taking the medication.

Head or neck injuries. Trauma to the head or neck can cause damage to any part of the auditory canal, affecting the hearing process.

Ménière's disease. Tinnitus is a symptom of Ménière's disease, which is caused a buildup of fluid in the inner ear.

Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. The temporomandibular joint (commonly known as TMJ) is the jaw joint. Misalignment and/or dysfunction of this joint creates stress on the bones, muscles, joints, and tendons of the head and neck, including those of the ear.

Acoustic neuroma or other head and neck tumors. Acoustic neuroma is a benign (non-cancerous) tumor that grows on the nerves in the inner ear that are responsible for hearing and balance. The pressure on the nerve from the tumor may cause hearing loss, imbalance, and tinnitus. Other head, neck or brain tumors can also cause tinnitus.

Blood vessel disorders. High blood pressure and other disorders or malformations in the blood vessels and arteries, especially those near the ears, can cause pulsating tinnitus.

Other chronic conditions. Conditions including diabetes, thyroid problems, migraines, anemia, and autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus have all been associated with tinnitus.

■ Treating Tinnitus

If your physician can determine an underlying condition that causes your tinnitus, treating that condition may help eliminate the sound. This may include ear wax removal, cochlear implants, surgery, or discontinuation of medication. Your ENT physician may refer you to another specialist who can treat your condition.

Unfortunately, in cases with no known cause, there is no specific cure. The goal, then, is to reduce the impact of tinnitus and help you live more comfortably with the condition. After a thorough evaluation, your ENT physician may recommend:

Hearing aids. Hearing aids are the primary treatment for most cases of tinnitus, which is usually related to hearing loss. Hearing aids introduce more sound into the brain, naturally reducing the tinnitus perception. Many hearing aids have imbedded tinnitus sound programs to attempt to train the brain not to recognize the tinnitus as much.

Masking machines. White noise machines produce quiet, subtle, calming sounds that can help mask the sounds of tinnitus. There are options that can be worn in the ear. Similarly, fans, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, and air conditioners can help in the same way. Be sure to keep the noise setting low.

Bi-modal therapy. Bimodal therapy uses sound and touch to change how your brain perceives sound.

Counseling. Behavioral treatment helps you change the way you think and feel about your symptoms to help reduce the anxiety that often accompanies tinnitus.

Medications. Low-dose anti-anxiety medications and antidepressants may reduce the impact of tinnitus.

Acupuncture. While not medically proven to be successful, some people report improvement with acupuncture.

Future developments. Scientists are studying magnetic or electrical stimulation of the brain to help relieve symptoms of tinnitus.



Your Tinnitus Team: Florida Gulf Coast ENT + Florida Gulf Coast Hearing Center

Florida Gulf Coast ENT offers a full-service hearing center located onsite at our three locations. The experienced and skilled audiologists at the Florida Gulf Coast Hearing Center conduct highly specialized hearing and vestibular testing and offer cutting-edge treatments for all forms of hearing loss and hearing disorders.

Working together, our team of physicians and audiologists will perform a thorough exam and testing to determine your specific diagnosis and treatment options. Our unique combination of ear, nose and throat physicians and highly trained hearing specialists make our practice the optimal care provider for your hearing health.



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