



Tinnitus- what to think about before visiting your GP

We have produced this guide to help you prepare for and get the most out of an appointment with your GP.

Because there is no simple test for tinnitus you will need to describe to your GP what you are experiencing and answer some questions such as those we have listed below. It is worth thinking about these beforehand and perhaps writing down your responses. You may find it helpful to take this guide along with you.

What is your tinnitus like?

- Is it a high or low pitched noise?
- Is the noise experienced in both ears, one ear, in the head or is it external?
- Is it pulsatile (a rhythmic sound that you experience in time with your heartbeat) or is it constant?

Possible risk factors:

- Have you noticed any recent change in your hearing?
- Have you been exposed to loud noise (either at a music concert or night club etc, in your employment or through DIY?)
- Have you had a head injury?
- Have you taken any medication which may cause tinnitus such as aspirin, quinine (anti-malarial), NSAIDs (anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen, naproxen etc.), loop diuretics (water tablets), some antibiotics, and some anti-cancer drugs)?
- Have you recently been taking, or suddenly stopped taking benzodiazepines (diazepam, nitrazepam, or temazepam etc)?
- Do you have increased risk factors for furring up of the arteries –close family members who have had a stroke or heart disease, high cholesterol or high blood pressure?
- Have you a dietary or inherited risk of low vitamin B12?
- Have you noticed any weakness, clumsiness, pins and needles, or other change in sensation in any other part of your body?
- Do you have a history of heart disease, stroke (or TIA/mini-stroke), or furring up of your arteries in your legs (Claudication)?

Following a discussion your GP may:

1. Examine your ears for infection or earwax build up
2. Refer you to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist for further tests
3. Arrange for an examination of your nervous system
4. Arrange a blood test for your vitamin B12 level, and cholesterol levels.
5. Refer you to a tinnitus clinic for tinnitus therapy
6. Trial a medication
7. Refer you to an audiologist for hearing tests and hearing aids (this can reduce tinnitus in many sufferers)
8. Refer you for a brain scan

Remember that tinnitus is a symptom rather than a disease, and it is very rare for it to be associated with a significant or worrying problem, it is also very common.

You can also try and help yourself in the following ways:

1. Consider noise 'masking' – keeping a radio, TV or sound generator on low volume at night etc
2. Try and practice relaxation techniques
3. Wear hearing aids as advised (and ensure proper fitting with your audiologist). Two hearing aids may be better than one for tinnitus
4. Avoid alcohol (although a small amount may help relaxation)
5. Talk to other people with tinnitus, and see what they find helpful

Deafness Research UK is the only national medical research charity dedicated to helping people with deafness, tinnitus or other hearing problems.

Scientists are now predicting that within the next ten to fifteen years there could be a cure for some forms of deafness and much more effective treatments for tinnitus. Deafness Research UK is at the forefront of this work.

You can support us by making a donation or joining the Deafness Research UK League of Friends. For more information call us on 0207 833 1733 or write to:

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Charity no. 326915

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