

# Hearing HealthCare News<sup>®</sup>

A newsletter for our patients, their families and friends

 Winter 2015

## Tinnitus: Those Annoying Sounds in Your Ears

Tinnitus is the ringing, buzzing, humming, or roaring sounds that a person hears when no outside sound is actually present. About 14 million people in the U.S. and Canada suffer from severe tinnitus.

There is a strong relationship between tinnitus and hearing loss. About 20% of patients with hearing loss complain of tinnitus and about 90% of patients with severe tinnitus have hearing loss.

### Causes

Tinnitus can be caused by high blood pressure, certain medications (including high levels of aspirin), noise, physical injury, Meniere's disease, and even impacted ear wax. Recent research suggests tinnitus may also be caused by spontaneous neural activity within the brain.

Tinnitus is usually matched to a high pitched tone or noise band at a surprisingly soft level. However, there is little relationship between the loudness of the tinnitus and the amount of handicap or annoyance it causes.

Tinnitus can be a disturbing and upsetting phenomenon. About 80% of individuals who seek medical attention for their tinnitus are told, "there's nothing that can be done to help. You'll just have to learn to live with it." In fact, various treatments are available and help is available. Most of those who seek treatment report some relief.

### Helping the Tinnitus Patient

Tinnitus treatment may include *medical and audiologic evaluation, information, counseling, and perhaps a treatment regime.*

The purpose of the medical evaluation is to ensure that the tinnitus is not caused by a medical condition that needs treatment. In nearly all cases, no specific cause is found.

The purpose of the *audiologic evaluation* is to identify any hearing loss. *Counseling* and a *tinnitus evaluation* can also be considered.

Lowering intake of *caffeine, nicotine* and *alcohol*, minimizing *noise exposure* and moderate amounts of *exercise* can help. Counseling can also review the many treatment options available.

### Treatments

There are a variety of tinnitus treatments available. These include *tinnitus maskers, biofeedback, cognitive behavioral therapy, habituation therapy, hearing aids, medication* and *tinnitus maskers.*

About 65% of those with both hearing loss and tinnitus report that their hearing

## Keep Your Hearing in Good Shape!

We all know that exercise is good for keeping our bodies in good shape. We also know that people who exercise—or at least those with good cardiovascular health—tend to have better hearing.

There is evidence that exercising our ears is also good for keeping our hearing in good shape.

A number of studies have demonstrated that individuals with hearing loss in both ears who use only one hearing aid tend to maintain or improve their ability to understand words in the ear with the hearing aid. The ear *without* the hearing aid tends to decline in word recognition ability. This decline is not a change in hearing sensitivity, but rather is a decline in the ability to *process* the complex speech signal simply through lack of use.

One explanation of this gradual decline is that the ear without the hearing aid isn't being "exercised" very much. Another explanation is that the area of the brain involved in hearing is not being used and becomes less effective at processing speech information.

This gradual decline in speech recognition ability *usually* reverses itself once the ear gets more stimulation (normally through use of a hearing aid). This gradual improvement in speech

aids either reduce or eliminate their tinnitus. Some people with tinnitus and no hearing loss wear *tinnitus maskers*. These small instruments look like hearing aids but actually generate a very soft sound that can remove or reduce the awareness of tinnitus.

There are also more than 50 over-the-counter products that claim to alleviate or eliminate tinnitus. Writing in a recent issue of *Tinnitus Today*, audiologist Robert DiSogra, Au.d., noted these products include "herbal supplements, vitamins and various homeopathic remedies, and are available as pills, powders, liquids, sprays and teas. None have been clinically proven to alleviate tinnitus."

For more information, contact the **American Tinnitus Association** at (503) 248-9985 (or go to [www.ata.org](http://www.ata.org)). The **Consumer Handbook on Tinnitus** is available for \$32.95 at (928) 284-0860.

understanding may take four to six weeks after the hearing aid fitting, and may continue for up to 12 weeks.

### Implications

The findings from a number of studies suggest the following:

**The longer a hearing loss is ignored, the greater the effects.** The longer someone puts off using hearing aids, the more likely word recognition ability will decline. The delay may also make it more difficult to adjust to hearing aids. To use the exercise analogy, if you don't exercise for 10 years, it may take longer to get back in shape.

**The sooner hearing loss is treated, the easier the adjustment.** If you never let your hearing get "out of shape," it's much easier to adjust to hearing full-time.

**In almost all cases, two hearing aids are better than one.** Two hearing aids will keep *both* ears and *both* sides of the brain actively involved in hearing.

*Exercising your ears keeps your hearing in good shape.*

**Improved hearing may take a little time.** Although hearing aids provide immediate benefits, it can take 6 to 12 weeks for a hearing aid user to get the *full* benefits of the improved hearing provided by hearing aids.

## Your Ears: High Risk for Skin Cancer

Will you be getting some sun over the winter months? If so, be careful. As small as the ears are, a third of all skin cancers occur on the outer ear.

About 85% of ear skin cancers occur in men. This is probably because of their shorter hair and being out in the sun more often.

Your best preventative is regular and liberal use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen. Take special care to apply sunscreen to the complex structures and grooves of the ears. And be sure to include the back of your ear, where a full third of ear skin cancers occur.



Exercise is good for your body—and your ears.

## Lipreading: Extra Help At No Extra Charge

Are you a good lipreader?

Most people with hearing loss are good lipreaders, even if they don't know it. And when you use those lipreading skills, your understanding of speech goes up by about 30%!

Almost everyone "hears better" when they are looking at the person talking. And you don't need special lessons or classes in order to benefit from lipreading. Fortunately, the sounds that are *hardest* to hear are also the ones that are *easiest* to lipread.

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hardest to hear are are  
easiest to lipread.*

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For example, "f" as in "fin" and "p" as in "pin" are difficult to hear because they are

soft, high-pitched sounds. But these same sounds are easy to lipread because they're made with the lip and tongue, and are very visible. With the help of lipreading, it's fairly easy to "hear" the difference between "fin" and "pin."

Vowels are more difficult to lipread—but usually much easier to hear.

And lipreading happens automatically. You don't have to think about how "f" looks different from "p". You don't need to take special classes. But you *do* have to be able to see the person who's talking!

### Test your lipreading skills

With your eyes closed, adjust the volume of your television to a very soft level. You should be able to *hear* the sound, but not *understand* the voices. Now open your eyes

and see how much more you can understand. That's the difference lipreading makes.

### Lipreading tips

- Ask the speaker to get your attention before starting a conversation.
- Make sure you can see the speaker's face. You can't read lips from another room or if the person is turned away from you!
- Watch the speaker's face, not just the lips. Facial expressions and gestures often give important clues.
- Concentrate on the general conversation rather than individual sounds and words.
- Concentrate on how much you understand, not on what you miss.

Lip reading can be a great source of help. It's almost like having a third hearing aid—and it's free!



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## Hearing Aids Make You Feel Better

Did you know that the improved communication provided by your hearing aids can have a positive effect on how you feel?

A university study asked a group of adults with hearing loss about their health and how they *felt* about their health. Each was then fitted with hearing aids. Six months later, they were asked the questions again. After using hearing aids, there was a significant improvement in how people felt about their health, even though their actual health status did not improve.

One possible cause for "feeling better" might be the increased social interaction with family and friends. In addition, research has demonstrated that hearing aids allow you to listen with less effort and energy. As a result, hearing aid users feel less tired, less stress—and just "feel better."

Sincerely,

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