

TINNITUS INFORMATION LEAFLET



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1. What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is the name given to any kind of noise that you hear in your ear/s or your head that other people cannot hear. Different types of sounds that can vary in volume are heard by different people. The most common descriptions are ringing, buzzing, whistling, cracking, humming, rushing, pulsating.

Experiences of tinnitus are very common from children through to adults. Approximately 30% of people will experience tinnitus at some point in their life. About 1 in 7 people will experience persistent tinnitus. The noises, which could have a gradual or sudden onset, may seem worse if you are anxious or stressed. You may naturally be frightened about the tinnitus and your concentration or sleep may be disturbed.

Pulsatile Tinnitus refers to the rhythmical noises that beat in time with your pulse and heard directly by the inner ear. It is usually caused by either blood flow changes in the blood vessels near our ear or increased awareness of the blood flow

Important note

It is important to remember that tinnitus is a symptom, not a disease. It is typically a symptom of an ear-related issue or other health changes. In the vast majority of cases, tinnitus is not caused by anything medically worrying or serious.

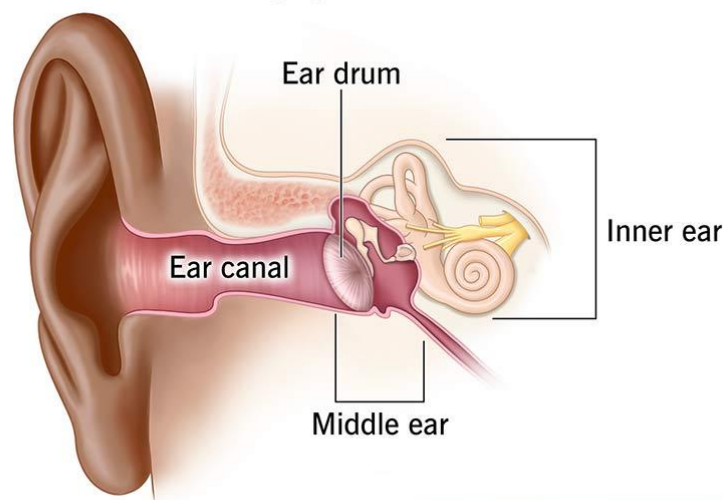
2. What causes tinnitus?

The exact cause of tinnitus is not always clear, and sometimes there is no specific explanation for it. However, it can be triggered by:

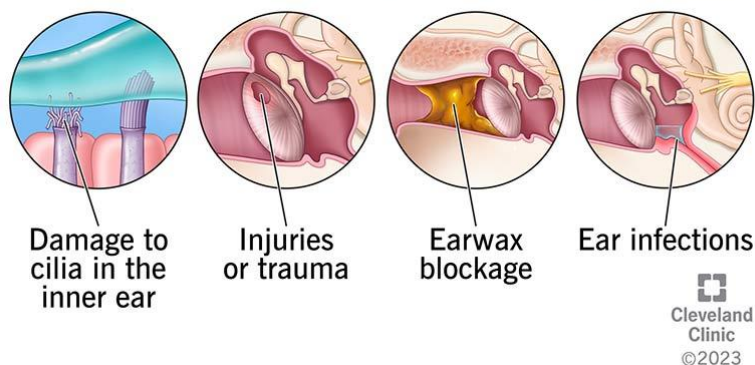
- Hearing loss: Your brain may "fill in" sounds it can no longer hear.
- Ear problems: This includes earwax buildup, ear infections, or a damaged eardrum.
- Other health issues: Such as head or neck injuries, jaw problems, or heart and blood vessel conditions.
- Medication: Some drugs can cause tinnitus or make it worse.
- Stress: Changes in your stress levels can also affect it

Tinnitus

Ringling in the ears



Common causes of tinnitus



3. Strategies to help and manage your tinnitus

There is no single "quick fix" for tinnitus. Instead, the best results come from using a mix of the strategies listed below. To see a real difference, you will need to use these tools consistently over time., so it is important to stay patient as you try them.

The goal is to reach a point where:

- The sounds feel much quieter or more distant.
- The noise no longer bothers you or triggers negative thoughts.
- The "bad days" happen much less often.

4. Using Sound to Help Your Tinnitus

Many people find their tinnitus feels louder in quiet places, like a silent office or in bed at night. This is because your brain has nothing else to focus on.

The goal of **Sound Enrichment** is to give your brain other sounds to listen to.

What sounds should I use?

The best sounds are those that you find relaxing and that don't trigger any strong emotions. You might need to try a few different options to see what works for you:

- *Nature sounds:* Many people find the sound of rain, the sea, or birds soothing.
- *Background noise:* Try leaving a radio or TV on at a low volume, or simply open a window to let in outside noise.
- *Apps and devices:* There are many free mobile apps that play calming "white noise" or natural sounds.
- *At night:* While music or radio is fine during the day, neutral nature sounds are usually better for helping you fall asleep.

5. How to use sound enrichment during the day

To help your brain "re-train" itself, keep these three tips in mind:

1. *Don't "mask" the sound:* This is the most important rule. You should still be able to hear your tinnitus quietly in the background. If you drown it out completely (masking), your brain can't learn to ignore it.
2. *Use it often:* The more you use background sound, the faster your brain learns to filter the tinnitus out. Over time, you may find you need the extra sound less and less.
3. *Wear your hearing aids:* If you use hearing aids, keep them in while using sound enrichment. This helps your brain process all the sounds correctly.

6. How to use sound enrichment at night or during quiet activities

Trying to sleep or read when your tinnitus is loud can be exhausting. Using "sound enrichment" during these times can provide a soothing distraction.

- *Pick a relaxing sound:* Choose a natural sound you enjoy, like gentle rainfall.
- *Make it a habit:* Try starting the sound 30 minutes before you go to bed. This helps it become a normal part of your nightly routine.
- *Keep it on:* If you wake up in the night, having the sound play at a low volume until morning can help you drift back to sleep.
- *Be mindful of your partner:* If the sound bothers someone else, you can use pillow speakers or a bluetooth soft headband with built-in earphones so only you can hear it.
- *Get the volume right:* The sound should be set at a similar level to your tinnitus—not so loud that it drowns it out, but enough to blend with it.

7. Ear-Level Noise Generators (Sound Generators)

These are small, wearable devices that look like hearing aids. Instead of making outside sounds louder, they produce a constant, gentle rushing noise (for example, "white noise"). This sound is designed to be soothing and easy to listen to.

It helps by making your hearing system less sensitive to all sounds, including your tinnitus. By providing a neutral background sound, it helps your brain "turn down the volume" on the tinnitus.

Tips for using your noise generators:

- *Find the "Mixing Point":* The goal is **not** to drown out your tinnitus (masking). Instead, the volume should be set slightly *lower* than your tinnitus. You should be able to hear both sounds at the same time. This allows your brain to get used to the tinnitus so it can eventually filter it out.
- *Wear two devices:* Even if you only hear tinnitus in one ear, it is best to wear a generator in both ears. This ensures your entire hearing system is balanced and exposed to the soothing sound.
- *Wear them all day:* For the best results, you should wear your noise generators throughout your waking hours. This gives your brain the consistent information it needs to start "re-training" itself.
- *Professional fitting:* Your audiologist will tailor the volume of the sound to your specific needs to ensure it is as effective as possible.

8. Hearing Aids

Many people find that improving their hearing is the most effective way to manage tinnitus. By wearing hearing aids, you are giving your brain "sound enrichment" all day long.

- *Enrich your environment:* Hearing aids bring back the everyday sounds you've been missing. These sounds act as a natural distraction.
- *Reduce the effort:* Hearing aids work brilliantly alongside other tools, such as bedside sound machines or relaxation apps.
- *Wear them all day:* By wearing them from the moment you wake up until you go to bed, you are helping your brain re-train itself to ignore the tinnitus signal.

9. Combination Devices

A Combination Unit is a single ear-level device that does two jobs at once: it works as a hearing aid while also playing a gentle background sound.

Why use a combination unit?

- *Double the Support:* These units provide the benefits of both amplification (making sounds louder) and sound therapy (providing a distraction).
- *Extra Relief:* Sometimes, just making external sounds louder isn't enough to distract you from your tinnitus. Adding a soft, rushing "white noise" in the background can further help reduce how much you notice the tinnitus.
- *All-Day Relief:* To get the best results, you should wear these devices during all your waking hours.

10. Sleep

It is common for people with tinnitus to find falling asleep a challenge. Often, this is because the bedroom is much quieter than the rest of the house, which makes the tinnitus feel louder.

Understanding Your Sleep Cycle

Sleep is a 24-hour cycle. What you do during the day—your activity, light exposure, and stress—affects how you sleep at night. It is also important to remember:

- *Waking up is normal:* A typical night's sleep includes several brief awakenings. Most people forget these by morning.
- *Tinnitus isn't usually the "alarm":* Research suggests tinnitus rarely wakes you up. Instead, it is simply the first thing you notice when you naturally wake during the night.
- *Worry is the real culprit:* If you begin to worry about your tinnitus or the amount of sleep you are losing, those natural "mini-awakenings" last much longer and become harder to ignore.

The Good News

Many people with tinnitus sleep very well and find sleep to be a refreshing break from the sound. Studies show that people who sleep well don't have "quieter" tinnitus; they simply have fewer worries about it at night.

By changing how you think about your sleep and your tinnitus, you can reduce the distress and get the rest you need.

11. Top Tips for a Better Night's Sleep

Dos:

- **Stay Active:** Engaging in regular exercise during the day can help manage stress and reduce fatigue. Avoid intense physical activity near bedtime to prevent disruption of the sleep cycle.
- **Unwind Before Bed:** Allocate at least one hour before bedtime to relax. A calm mind facilitates easier sleep.
- **Listen to Sleep Signals:** Head to bed when feeling sleepy rather than strictly following the clock.
- **Maintain a Consistent Wake-Up Time:** Getting up at the same time every day, including weekends, and avoiding daytime naps helps regulate the body clock.
- **Practice Relaxation:** Techniques such as yoga, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation during the day can make it easier to settle at night.
- **Move if Sleep is Elusive:** If sleep does not come within 25 to 30 minutes, go to another room and do something relaxing like reading. Return to bed only when sleepy.
- **Consult Medical Professionals:** Discuss insomnia or potential underlying medical issues with a doctor. While medication is not a long-term solution, it may provide relief during a short-term crisis under medical guidance.

Don'ts:

- **Over-rely on Stimulants:** Limit the intake of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, especially in the evening.
- **Force Sleep:** Avoid "trying hard" to fall asleep. Resting quietly in the dark can be beneficial, and sleep often arrives when the body is ready.
- **Mix Work and Sleep Spaces:** Use the bedroom only for sleep and relaxation. Activities like watching television, working, or doing puzzles can stimulate the mind and hinder rest.
- **Self-Medicating with Alcohol:** Do not use alcohol or over-the-counter medicines to induce sleep, as they can disrupt normal sleep patterns.
- **Remain Sedentary After Poor Sleep:** Following a bad night, staying active can help prevent increased tiredness and promote better sleep the following night.

For further support, resources such as the [Every Mind Matters - NHS](#) website provide guided relaxation and sleep advice

12. Stress And Well-Being

Most people experience stress at some point, usually when the demands of life feel greater than our ability to cope. There is a very strong link between stress and tinnitus—they often feed into each other in a cycle.

The Stress-Tinnitus Cycle

It is very common for tinnitus to start during a stressful time, or for existing tinnitus to feel louder when you are under pressure. This happens because:

A sense of "threat": If you see tinnitus as a threat to your health or peace of mind, your brain stays on "high alert."

Constant monitoring: Because your brain feels threatened, it focuses all its attention on the sound to "monitor" it.

Difficult to filter: This constant focus makes it much harder for your brain to naturally filter the sound out.

Increased sensitivity: The more you focus on the sound, the louder and more intrusive it can feel, which leads to more stress.

How to Break the Cycle

The goal is to shift how you think about the sound. By reducing your stress and seeing tinnitus as a "neutral" background noise rather than a "threat," you allow your brain to stop monitoring it. Over time, this makes the sound feel quieter and less important.

What can I do to manage stress?

Taking steps to lower your stress will help you feel more in control and better able to cope with tinnitus. Here are some effective ways to start:

Keep a Tinnitus Journal: Write down when your tinnitus feels worse and what is happening in your life at that time. Identifying these patterns can help you change how you react to stressful events.

Find Your "De-stress" Activity: Whether it is a hobby, a walk, or a quiet moment, making time for things that make you feel happy and healthy is vital.

Try Relaxation Techniques: Simple breathing exercises or muscle relaxation can be done anywhere—at work, at home, or before bed. You can find guided guides on the Tinnitus UK website.

Explore Complementary Therapies: While things like yoga, acupuncture, aromatherapy, or reflexology may not stop the sound directly, they improve your overall wellbeing. This makes the tinnitus feel much less noticeable.

Getting Extra Support

If stress is leading to low mood, anxiety, or depression, it is important to seek professional help, as these feelings can make tinnitus harder to ignore.

You can refer yourself directly to **Talking Therapies** without needing to see your GP first. They offer support to help you manage the emotional impact of tinnitus.

[Talking Therapies | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

13. How Your Brain Filters Sound: The "Gatekeeper"

Your brain is constantly bombarded by hundreds of sounds. To cope, a part of your brain called the limbic system acts as a "gatekeeper" or filter.

How the filter works: It automatically decides which sounds are important (like someone calling your name or a baby crying) and which are "junk" (like a humming fridge or a ticking clock). It blocks the "junk" so you don't even notice it.

The Tinnitus "Glitch": When you first hear tinnitus, it can feel strange or worrying. If you have negative thoughts about the sound—such as feeling angry, trapped, or anxious—your "gatekeeper" identifies the sound as a threat.

Opening the Gate: Because your brain thinks the sound is a threat, it stops filtering it out. Instead, it lets the sound straight through to your conscious mind, so you stay "alert" to it.

The Cycle of Tinnitus Awareness

When we focus on something, it naturally feels bigger and louder. This creates a cycle that can be hard to break:

- **Focus:** You pay close attention to the tinnitus because it feels important or worrying.
- **Sensitivity:** The more you monitor the sound, the more sensitive your hearing system becomes to it.
- **Physical Reaction:** Your body reacts to the "threat" with stress or anger. This triggers your nervous system, making you feel physically tense or "on edge."
- **Increased Awareness:** This physical stress signals to the brain that the tinnitus is a major problem, which makes the brain focus on it even more.

Breaking the Cycle

The goal of management is to teach your "gatekeeper" that tinnitus is unimportant background noise. By reducing the negative emotions and stress associated with the sound, you help your brain's filter system to start closing the gate again. Over time, this leads to habituation, where the sound is still there, but you simply stop noticing it.

What to do to break the cycle

Your brain's "gatekeeper" (the filter system) is guided by your thoughts, actions, and attention. If you believe the sound is a threat, your brain will keep the "gate" open. To turn the volume down, you need to change how you react to the sound.

Shifting to a Neutral Mindset

The goal is to move away from automatic negative thoughts and towards a more objective view:

- Identify the "Bad Habit": Negative feelings like anger or fear keep you on "high alert." Think of these as a habit that can be broken with time and patience.
- See it as a "False Alarm": Try to view your tinnitus objectively—like a bird chirping outside or a hum from a fridge. It is a sound that has no important meaning.
- The Power of "Neutral": When you tell yourself the sound isn't a threat, your gatekeeper starts to block it again. This is how you begin to "filter out" the noise naturally.

Be Patient with Yourself

Changing your emotional response to tinnitus is undeniably difficult and takes time, commitment, and patience. It won't happen overnight, but with practice, it is entirely possible to reach a stage where you simply stop noticing the sound.

14. Recommended Apps for Tinnitus Relief

- **ReSound Tinnitus Relief:** A great starting point. It offers a wide range of **customisable sounds** (like rain or white noise) alongside guided relaxation exercises.
 - **Best for:** Personalised sound therapy.
 - Download on the App Store | Get it on Google Play
- **Oto:** Designed by doctors and specialists, this app focuses on **habituation**. It uses techniques like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness to help your brain "filter out" the noise.
 - **Best for:** A structured, professional coaching approach.
 - Visit the Oto Website
- **Tinnibot:** This acts as a **virtual assistant**. It provides daily activities, educational resources, and mindfulness exercises to help reduce the emotional impact of tinnitus.
 - **Note:** Some features are free, but full access requires a subscription.

- Find Tinnibot here
- **MindEar:** This app provides a **customised care plan** based on your specific needs. It combines sound therapy with educational tools to help you understand and manage your tinnitus more effectively.
 - **Note:** This app requires a paid subscription.
 - **Explore MindEar**

15. Additional resources.

- Tinnitus UK [Leaflets and publications - Tinnitus UK](#)
- RNID: [RNID - National hearing loss charity](#)
- Talking Therapies: [Talking Therapies | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

16. Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact us:

Email: hearingandbalance@berkshire.nhs.uk or hearingaidrepairs@berkshire.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0300 365 6222 (please leave a voicemail if there is no answer)

Website: [Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)