IT'S A NOISY WORLD • PROTECT YOUR EARS

TINNITUS

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is humming, ringing, buzzing, or other sounds in the ears or head that lasts more than 5 minutes and occurs at least twice a week. It can be a sign of damage to the inner ear.

How do you pronounce "tinnitus"?

"ti-**night**-us" or "**tin**-uh-tus"—either is correct.

What causes tinnitus?

There are many causes of tinnitus. The most common cause of tinnitus (and hearing loss) is exposure to loud sounds. Loud sounds can also worsen any existing hearing loss or tinnitus. It is, therefore, important to **wear proper hearing protection** when around dangerously loud sounds. Additional causes include head injury, medications, and ear wax.

Is there a cure for tinnitus?

Scientists around the world are looking for a cure, but there is no cure yet. However, there are many ways to feel better without making tinnitus quieter.

Does my tinnitus make it harder for me to hear?

Many people have hearing problems along with tinnitus. Some people think that the tinnitus causes their hearing problems—which is generally not true (**hearing loss** is usually the cause of hearing problems). If you have tinnitus or hearing problems, you should have a hearing test.

Can medications help?

It is rare for a medication to reduce the loudness of tinnitus. All medications used for tinnitus were actually developed for other problems like: depression, anxiety, and trouble sleeping. Some of these medications can improve your mood. A better mood can help make tinnitus less of a problem.

What should I do about my tinnitus?

Start by getting a hearing test (and hearing aids if needed). Hearing aids can help with a hearing problem by amplifying sounds. Amplifying sounds can also help with tinnitus. Most people say that they notice their tinnitus less when they are wearing hearing aids.

How can I feel better without making my tinnitus quieter?

You can feel better by learning how to change your reactions to tinnitus—or by learning to **manage** your reactions to tinnitus. Exercise, a healthy diet, proper sleep, and stress reduction—can all help you manage your tinnitus.

This information sheet was created by the VA NCRAR in collaboration with the DoD HCE and members of the VA/DoD Tinnitus Working Group.
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How can I manage my reactions to tinnitus?

You can use **sounds** to make life with tinnitus more comfortable. **Soothing sounds** can help you feel better without making your tinnitus quieter. **Interesting or entertaining sounds** can help get your mind off your tinnitus. **Background sounds** make it easier to ignore your tinnitus. Examples of these types of sounds are mentioned below.

Soothing Sounds		Relaxing music, Ocean waves
Interesting Sounds		Phone call, Audio book
Background Sounds		Fan noise, "Elevator" music

You can learn exercises to help you **relax.** Learning how to relax when you want to can help you feel better. You can **plan pleasant activities** even when your tinnitus is bothering you. Pleasant activities can help you enjoy life and help you get your mind off your tinnitus.

What you think affects how you feel. You **can change how you think about your tinnitus** from "there's no hope for my tinnitus" to thoughts like "I'm learning new ways to feel better without making my tinnitus quieter." With practice, changing your thoughts and attitudes can help you feel better. Ask your audiologist where to get help coming up with new ways to think about your tinnitus.

Searching for "tinnitus" where you download mobile apps will provide a list of apps for your smart phone that may be useful to you. Many free apps can provide soothing or background sounds, as well as breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.

What if I need more help?

If you need more help, contact your hearing health care provider. DoD/VA Audiologists are trained to help you with your tinnitus. Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM) was developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is used by the DoD and VA.

PTM
Progressive Tinnitus Management

In PTM, you learn how to use sound and how to change your thoughts and feelings to cope with tinnitus. Your audiologist can provide you with PTM materials, and can help you learn how to use them.

For more information about tinnitus, hearing loss, and/or hearing protection:

- Contact your local audiology or hearing conservation clinic
- Visit the following websites
  - VA National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR): **ncrar.research.va.gov**
  - DoD Hearing Center of Excellence (HCE): **hearing.health.mil**