

Frequently Asked Questions about Tinnitus Treatment

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus, by definition, is the perception of sound when there is no actual sound present. Tinnitus is a natural phenomenon – over 60 years ago, Heller and Bergman demonstrated that if people with normal hearing and no ear disease were placed in a quiet enough environment, most of them experienced sounds inside their head (Heller, 1953).

How many people experience tinnitus?

Temporary tinnitus is experienced by people of all ages (Coles, 1996). Between 6 - 30% of people experience tinnitus constantly and between 0.5 - 2 % of people with tinnitus are significantly affected by it (Coles, 1996; Davis, 1996; Davis & El Refaie, 2000; George & Kemp, 1991).

If you have a hearing loss, you are more likely to experience tinnitus than someone with normal hearing (Henry et al., 1999; Sindhusake et al., 2003).

Hearing loss leads to an increase in neural activity at various stages in the auditory nervous system (Kaltenbach et al., 1998, 2000; Kaltenbach & Afman, 2000; Brozoki et al., 2002; Kaltenbach et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2002; Seki & Eggermont, 2002, 2003; Noreña & Eggermont, 2003), this is what leads to the perception of tinnitus.

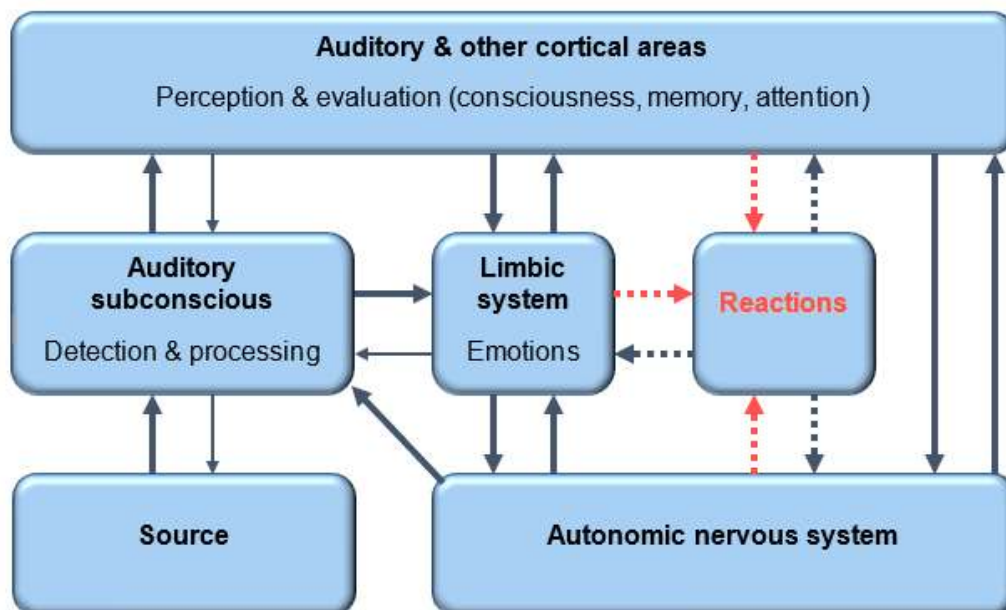
What does tinnitus sound like?

If you have a hearing loss, the sound of your tinnitus is likely to be related to the frequencies where your hearing loss is the most severe (Nicolas-Puel et al., 2002).

However, people who experience tinnitus may describe the sound as (but not limited to) ringing, hissing, white noise, roaring, screeching, buzzing, crickets, pulsing or clicking.

Why has tinnitus become a problem for me?

There are direct connections between the auditory system and the limbic system in the brain which governs emotional reaction. It is postulated that in people who are significantly distressed by their tinnitus, the limbic brain has attached a negative emotional label to the tinnitus sound (Jastreboff, 1990) – this happens reflexively and involuntarily. Whatever thoughts you have about your tinnitus, or physiological reactions (such as tension in your body) develop after this reaction has already taken place. Unfortunately, sometimes all these different reactions reinforce one another and lead to a self-perpetuating cycle.



What can be done about tinnitus?

The negative cycle described above can be undone, gradually and over time using two approaches:

1. Structured counselling, to help you understand more about what is happening, “demystify” tinnitus and give you strategies to help change the way you think about your tinnitus (this addresses the top part of the cycle).

2. Sound therapy, to slowly remove the negative emotional association that has been attached to the tinnitus, re-categorizing it as a neutral, or meaningless sound. This is known as *habituation*.

Will I be cured by tinnitus treatment?

Tinnitus is a symptom, not a disease. Just as many other symptoms cannot be completely gotten rid of, the same goes for tinnitus. This treatment may not be able to stop you from hearing your tinnitus, but there is a high chance that at the end of the process it will no longer be a significant problem in your life.

How long does the treatment take?

It could take between 9 – 12 months before the treatment can be considered successful.

What is the success rate of the treatment?

Independent studies on Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) have quoted up to an 80% success rate. In these studies, treatment was considered successful if at the end of the treatment the patient rated tinnitus as significantly less of a problem in their life than at the beginning of treatment. Success did not necessarily mean the patient no longer heard their tinnitus.

What tinnitus services are offered at Lindfield Audiology?

This practice offers Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) and Tinnitus Activities Treatment (TAT). Depending on the daily life activities that are impacted by your tinnitus (e.g. concentration, sleep, communication and emotional well-being), it may be appropriate to combine both treatments.

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