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Mills & McKinney  
Hearing Practice

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# Tinnitus FAQ

## What is Tinnitus?

Tinnitus is simply the name for noises in the head or ears – the word is derived from the Latin “Tinnare” which means “to ring”. It has been described for as long as humans can write and is as common as the common cold. Most people are not bothered by their tinnitus, however for an important minority of people it can be loud, annoying, intrusive and life changing.

## What causes Tinnitus?

There are many different causes of tinnitus, and many different types of tinnitus. Common causes include:

- Loud noise
- Ear Wax
- Hearing Loss
- Ear infections
- Ear Trauma
- Stress and anxiety
- Low mood state
- A traumatic life event

If your tinnitus is associated with pain, facial weakness, changes in your balance, or sudden hearing loss you should seek medical help as soon as possible.

However, in most cases tinnitus does not indicate anything serious – it is rather that your brain is mistakenly focusing on a small internally generated signal that should be filtered out as meaningless. Tinnitus therapy retrains your brain to do this.

## Is there a cure?

Most people will find that their tinnitus diminishes with time, and tinnitus therapy can speed up this process. There is no medical or surgical intervention for tinnitus that works consistently for everyone.

## **Do I have to learn to live with it?**

No – what you have to do is retrain your brain not to focus on tinnitus, and to do this you have to retrain your brain to think about it differently. So no, you don't just have to learn to live with it – unless you want to.

## **What are the effects of tinnitus?**

Tinnitus affects everyone very differently. For most people there are very few or no effects, but for others it can be life changing. There are very important reasons for this that depend on individual circumstances, and if you are troubled by tinnitus please contact us.

## **Does it sound the same for everyone?**

No it doesn't. Ringing and high-pitched hissing are common sounds, but it can be just about any sound you can imagine, including music. Most people hear it in both ears, but it can be stronger in one ear than the other, heard only on one side, or heard in or around the head.

## **What research is going on?**

There is an enormous amount of research going on, from clinical trials of different interventions to examining brain function in response to tinnitus researchers are trying to understand and treat tinnitus better. Whilst we are a long way off a medical or surgical cure, we have already learnt an enormous amount about what is and isn't helpful for people with tinnitus.

## **What should I do about it?**

If your tinnitus has just started, see your GP or refer yourself to an Audiological Physician or ENT specialist. It is important to check for wax, test your hearing, and exclude any underlying medical or physical cause. In most cases there is none, however further investigations can be arranged if necessary.

Once this has been done you may decide that you don't need any further action. However, it can be very helpful to book yourself in for a session with us to explain tinnitus therapy options, and give you a clear understanding of what is happening. We can arrange further more intensive tinnitus therapy as necessary.

## What should I not do?

Please don't google "tinnitus" – that said, it may be what brought you here. Like many things, tinnitus is not the same experience for everyone and if you read about someone with very troublesome tinnitus it can be difficult to put their experiences into perspective. If you are concerned, don't put off arranging an appointment. The sooner we can address your difficulties, the less troublesome your tinnitus will be in the future.

## Is tinnitus worse with hearing loss?

Not always, although if you have a hearing loss you may notice your tinnitus more. Hearing aids are very effective in reducing tinnitus.

## Why is my tinnitus louder in the quiet?

Because there is no other sound, and that makes your tinnitus relatively much louder. There are also fewer distractions to take your mind off it.

## My tinnitus is often louder when I wake up. Why is that?

No one knows for sure, and it may be different for each person. However, my personal view is that moving from sleep to wakefulness involves a "scan" of your sound environment, and if tinnitus is something that you have been troubled by, your brain will tune into it immediately. Just imagine that you went to sleep terrified of a spider in your room – you didn't like it, you feared it, but you eventually went to sleep. The first thing you would do when you woke up was look for that Spider, and when you saw it a flood of fear would occur causing you to continue watching it like a hawk. To change this, you need to retrain your fear reaction to the spider. It is the same with tinnitus – your response to it has to change before your brain will relax and start to ignore it.

## Can you get tinnitus and sound sensitivity together?

Yes, you can, and in fact it is common for people to have tinnitus and hyperacusis. For some people it is a bit like having an internal volume control that has been turned up – both tinnitus and external sounds appear louder. Some people also find that noise makes their tinnitus worse.

## Further information

Please see our Tinnitus emergency kit resource, and our managing tinnitus, changing negative thinking and relaxation techniques resources. You will find further information Tinnitus management in our services section. You will also find a blog about tinnitus in our Blog section.

The British Tinnitus Association also has some useful information. You can find this at <https://www.tinnitus.org.uk>

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## The Mills & McKinney Practice

**Department of Audiology & Audiological Medicine**

The Portland Hospital, 234 Great Portland Street  
London W1W 5QT

**Tel:** 020 7390 8057

**Email:** [info@mmhearing.com](mailto:info@mmhearing.com)

[www.mmhearing.com](http://www.mmhearing.com)