



Tinnitus

What is tinnitus ?

Tinnitus is usually defined as ringing in the the ears but it can be all kinds of sounds e.g. buzzing, a single pitch tone, a whining noise, rhythmic, high pitched or pulsing. It can appear to come from one ear, both ears or the middle of the head and it can be continuous or it can come and go. It is a sound that only you can hear and it comes from inside the hearing system. Tinnitus is very common and about 10% of people have it. People of all ages can have tinnitus although it is more common as people get older.

Where does the noise come from ?

In a very quiet place most people can hear a noise from inside their ear. This is totally normal. Many pieces of equipment or machinery generate a random noise when they are working. The same happens with the hearing system in that it generates it's own background noise when it is working. Many of us don't hear that noise most of the time because is is masked by the external sounds around us. We are only aware of it in a very quiet place.

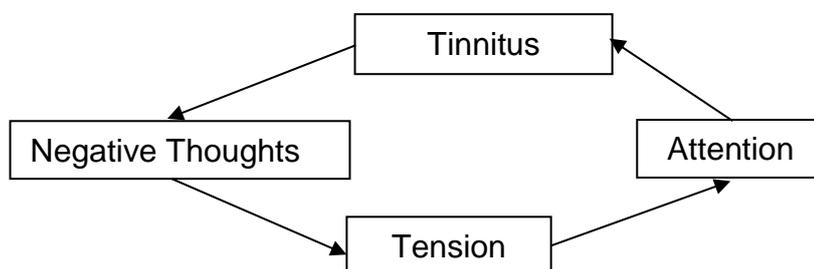
There are some situations when this internal noise is more likely to be heard. Most people have experienced hearing tinnitus for a while after being in a very loud place, such as a nightclub. Any sort of damage to the hearing system can also cause tinnitus and it is common in people with all types of hearing loss. Even very slight damage to the complex network of nerves that make up the hearing system (too small to be measured by standard hearing tests) can be enough to increase the noise in the ear.

How tinnitus becomes a problem?

The key to understanding tinnitus is to understand how the brain processes sound. Most of us are surrounded by noise almost all the time such as traffic noise, the fridge humming, the lights buzzing, the sound of the wind and the rain. Yet, the human brain is extremely good at filtering that out. Just imagine that you move to a new house close to a railway or a busy road. At first you will hear the trains and cars going by all the time, but after a few weeks you will barely notice them. This is because the brain cannot pay an equal amount of attention to every sound we hear so it gives priority to the sounds that have meaning and filters out the rest.

Now, imagine that you have a new neighbour that likes to do DIY late in the evening. You can hear hammering, drilling and sawing from next door and it never seems to stop. You ask them nicely to keep the noise down on more than one occasion but nothing changes. You start to

become angry and upset and the noise starts to set off all sorts of negative thoughts “*why do they have to work so late?*“, “*I can’t concentrate on my work*“. “*I can’t hear myself think*“, “*I wish they would move out*“. You get more tense and cannot help but focus on the sounds of hammering, drilling and sawing. So, instead of filtering out the noise your brain gives it full attention and soon you can’t think of anything else. People with tinnitus can get stuck in exactly the same cycle.



Tinnitus can trigger all sorts of negative thoughts which in turn may make the person feel tense or upset. This makes it much harder to shift attention away from the tinnitus and onto other things. It can be really difficult to think of anything else. Sometimes people avoid certain activities because they think this will make the tinnitus worse. People start to resent the tinnitus because it prevents them doing things they used to enjoy.

What to do about tinnitus ?

The key to treating tinnitus is to break that cycle. It involves teaching the brain to stop treating the tinnitus as an important sound and to filter it out. This is not always easy and it can take time.

Ways of treating tinnitus can include

- modify how a person thinks about their tinnitus.
- learn relaxation or meditation techniques to reduce tension
- listen to pleasant, neutral sounds – particularly at night time when it is quiet.
- wearing a hearing aid if there is a hearing loss as well (which can help to bring in more external sounds and make the internal sounds of tinnitus less obvious)

Useful links:-

www.tinnitus.org.uk lots of useful information about tinnitus

www.takeontinnitus.co.uk self help online course to help people with tinnitus

Tinnitus Apps :-

Resound tinnitus relief
Beltone tinnitus calmer
Relax melodies
myNoise