

Hearing aids and tinnitus

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Hearing aids can help relieve tinnitus and improve quality of life

Introduction

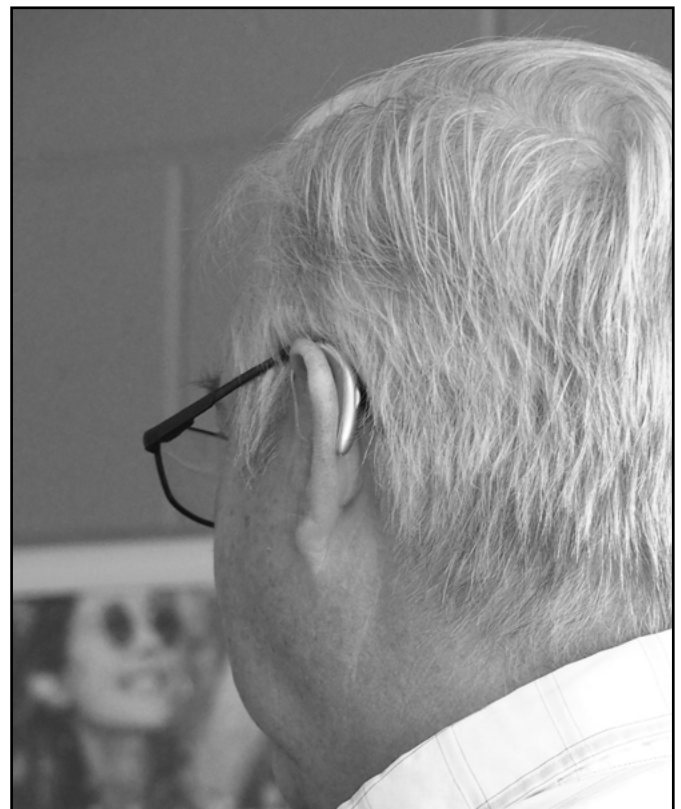
If you have hearing loss as well as tinnitus, your audiologist may recommend that you use a hearing aid. Here we look at the difference this could make for you. Hearing aids may be effective when used alone or as part of a mix of therapies and self-care actions.

The link between hearing loss and tinnitus

There is a common link between hearing loss and tinnitus. Put simply, the absence of heard sound is replaced by perceived sound. This isn't the same for everyone though and some people with normal hearing may also experience tinnitus. Even if you have not realised that you have lost some hearing, it is worth getting this checked as the loss can be gradual and unnoticeable.

Many people are surprised when they are told that they have a hearing loss.

It is quite common for people to blame their tinnitus rather than the hearing loss on the hearing difficulties they are having. Once a hearing loss has been found, the process of exploring solutions such as hearing aids, can start.



Tinnitus UK tries very hard to make sure our information is right, but it cannot tell you everything. It is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always check with your doctor or hearing health professional.

Evidence that hearing aids help

The aim of hearing aids is to correct any hearing loss with the expectation that this may help reduce your tinnitus. It has been found that hearing aids should be worn throughout the day to gain maximum benefit.

Bilateral hearing aids (one on each ear) have been shown to be more beneficial than using only one aid.

Since the introduction of digital hearing aids, there can be more accurate tailoring of hearing aids to an individual and this has brought about an increase in the beneficial effect of hearing aids for tinnitus.

Although some people feel that their hearing loss is acceptable for their age, any hearing loss that causes problems should be treated.

Some audiology departments will fit a hearing aid even where there is only a slight hearing loss, usually with an open-fit hearing aid.

Types of hearing aid

There are several different types of hearing aid. Our friends at RNID have useful information about the various types you may be offered at <https://bit.ly/4fnvtqS> but here we talk about the two most commonly used for people with tinnitus.

Open-fit hearing aids

Unlike the traditional ear mould aids, open-fit hearing aids use a very fine tube or a speaker placed in the ear canal to deliver sound. This allows amplification without blocking out external sounds or causing unpleasant occlusion effects which were a downside of ear mould aids.

Occlusion effects are when resonance is created in the blocked ear canal creating a "head in a barrel" sensation when speaking or chewing food.



Combination devices

Some hearing aids include a sound generator. In addition to amplifying sounds, they can play low level sounds in order to make the tinnitus sound less intrusive. However, the evidence into the effectiveness of this is not yet proven.

Research has been done with a small number of patients, but further work is required to single out the additional benefit from that given purely by amplification. The study concluded, "For most, amplification alone provided a reduction in tinnitus annoyance".

How can I get a hearing aid?

Currently, digital hearing aids are available on the NHS. These NHS hearing aids provide a good sound quality. On-going rehabilitation, servicing of the hearing aid, and replacement batteries are all free on the NHS.

Your GP can refer you to a local audiology service for a hearing test and the fitting of a hearing aid. A few audiology services may accept a self-referral.

Hearing aids are also prescribed and sold by private hearing aid dispensers. There may be some benefit to buying hearing aids privately as this can give

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access to the latest technology with wireless communication accessories and miniaturisation. The costs of buying a private hearing aid can be high and there may be no guarantee of an improved response in comparison with an NHS aid. There may be on-going costs with servicing, maintenance and batteries.

Whichever approach you take, it is important that you make sure your aid is fitted correctly. This means verifying the amount of sound being delivered to your ear by the hearing aid, particularly if you have tinnitus. If you feel that your hearing aid settings aren't right for you, it is important to go back to your hearing aid supplier to check settings and make adjustments.

If you do buy a hearing aid, remember to make sure it is covered by your insurance for loss or damage, both inside and outside your home.

Hearing aid maintenance

All hearing aids do require regular maintenance to work properly. Many hearing aids can be affected by ear wax and moisture, though some are coated in a protective invisible waterproof membrane. Your provider will give you advice on how to look after your hearing aid.

If a hearing aid has not been fitted correctly and is either over amplifying or under amplifying, this can cause problems. A check with the audiologist can help to sort it out.

A change in sound quality can also be caused through a build-up of wax on (or in) the hearing aid, or from damage to it. If you think your hearing aid may have a fault, contact the service who supplied it to you.



Good ear health

Hearing aid moulds, and also the ageing process, may lead to the build-up of ear wax. As a hearing aid user, you should have your ears checked regularly for a build-up of wax and have any excess removed. This is often carried out by a practice nurse, although some audiologists do perform wax removal.

Items used to remove wax, such as cotton buds can cause lasting damage to the ear. Please read our page about safe earwax removal at www.tinnitus.org.uk/tinnitus-and-ear-wax or see a professional such as your GP if you think you may have some wax.

Long-term use of hearing aids

It usually takes just a few weeks to adapt to using a hearing aid and adjust to your new levels of sound. Once this period of adjustment is over, wearing hearing aids becomes very natural. Many people become less aware of their tinnitus once their hearing loss is addressed and they become more aware of the sounds around them.

Once a hearing loss has been identified, you should have repeat hearing tests every three years.

Help and support

The Tinnitus UK Support Team can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics:

Telephone: **0800 018 0527**

Web chat: **tinnitus.org.uk**

Email: **helpline@tinnitus.org.uk**

Text/SMS: **07537 416841**

We also offer a free tinnitus e-learning programme, Take on Tinnitus at **takeontinnitus.co.uk**

References

The list of references consulted in the production of this leaflet is available on request.

Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on all our information.

You can pass your comments to our Communications Team:

Telephone: **0114 250 9933**

Email: **communications@tinnitus.org.uk**

or by writing to us at the address on page 5.

Tinnitus UK publications

**Available in Easy Read*

Our information leaflets are written by leading tinnitus professionals and provide accurate, reliable and authoritative information which is updated regularly. Please contact us if you would like to receive a copy of any of our information leaflets listed below, or they can be downloaded from our website.

For adults:

*All about tinnitus**
Complementary therapy for tinnitus: an opinion
Drugs and tinnitus
Ear wax removal and tinnitus
Flying and the ear
Food, drink and tinnitus
*Hearing aids and tinnitus**
Hyperacusis
Ideas for relaxation without sound
Information for musicians
Mindfulness for tinnitus
Musical hallucination (musical tinnitus)
Noise and the ear
Otosclerosis

Pulsatile tinnitus
Relaxation
*Self help for tinnitus**
Sound therapy
Sources of mutual support for tinnitus
Supporting someone with tinnitus
Taming tinnitus
Tinnitus and disorders of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and neck
Tinnitus: a parent's guide
Tinnitus: a teacher's guide
Tinnitus and sleep disturbance
Tinnitus and stress
*Tinnitus services**

For children:

Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus (under 8s)
Tinnitus (8-11 year olds)
Tinnitus (11-16 year olds)
Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus activity book
Tinnitus activity book (8-11 year olds)
Tinnitus activity book (11-16 year olds)



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