



# VA/DoD CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE FOR TINNITUS



Department of Veterans Affairs  
Department of Defense

## Patient Summary

### I. Bottom line up front

- Tinnitus affects everyone differently.
- There are many ways to improve quality of life and to be less bothered by tinnitus.
- There is no medication, surgery, or device that cures tinnitus.

### II. What is tinnitus?

- Tinnitus is a phantom sound in one ear, both ears, and/or the head. It is not a sound heard by others around you. You might hear this sound all the time or it might come and go. It might sound like ringing, buzzing, hissing, sizzling, roaring, chirping, or other sounds.
- Tinnitus is not the same for everyone. There are differences in the way it sounds, how often it is noticed, and how it affects daily life.
- If you hear very brief ear noise, such as a sudden tone or ringing sound in one ear lasting less than five minutes, this is normal. Sometimes you might also feel like your hearing changed when you hear the sudden noise. This is normal and you do not need to see a medical professional for very brief ear noise.
- Tinnitus might affect the quality of life in about 20% of people with tinnitus.
- Tinnitus can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep, concentrate, or make you feel irritable, anxious, or depressed.

### III. Hazardous noise

- Hazardous loud noise exposure is the most common risk factor for tinnitus.
- Prolonged exposure to hazardous levels of noise can cause permanent damage.
- Be mindful of hazardous noise sources such as loud music, power tools, heavy equipment, gunfire, or motorcycles.

- Take the necessary precautions to safeguard your ears, such as lowering the volume, moving away from the noise, or wearing properly fitted hearing protection.

#### **IV. When should you see a healthcare provider?**

- **You should see a healthcare provider immediately if you have:**
  - ◆ Facial weakness, head injury, or other urgent medical conditions.
  - ◆ Sudden hearing loss in one or both ears and/or recent loud noise trauma.
  - ◆ Ear pain, ear drainage, dizziness, vertigo, and/or pulsing tinnitus.
  - ◆ Thoughts of suicide or harming yourself.
- **If your tinnitus started gradually, you should see a healthcare provider for the following:**
  - ◆ Difficulty hearing or problems tolerating sound.
  - ◆ Problems with your jaw or neck associated with your tinnitus.

#### **V. What can you do?**

- **Get a hearing test.**
  - ◆ Tinnitus is often a sign of hearing loss.
- **Consider a trial of hearing aids** if your audiologist recommends them.
  - ◆ If you already have hearing aids, wear them every day.
  - ◆ Hearing aids might make tinnitus less noticeable and day-to-day conversations easier to understand.
- **Ask your health care provider about tinnitus care options.**
  - ◆ Your health care provider may refer you to other specialists when needed.
- **Ask about ways to use sound.**
  - ◆ Music, white noise, nature sounds, or other sounds might help you feel comfortable and relaxed.
- **Ask about programs to learn coping skills.**
  - ◆ Progressive Tinnitus Management or Living Better with Tinnitus workshops.
- **Ask about seeing a behavioral/mental health specialist.**
  - ◆ They can help you learn coping skills that can help you improve how you feel about tinnitus.
  - ◆ If you are already seeing a behavioral/mental health specialist, discuss your tinnitus with your provider.

- **Get treatment for other conditions** like anxiety, depression, insomnia, posttraumatic stress disorder, migraines, neck, and jaw problems.
  - ◆ Treating other conditions can make it easier to live with tinnitus.
- **You can improve how you live with tinnitus** depending on your willingness and ability to change your approach to tinnitus.
  - ◆ Learning and practicing coping skills and taking healthy actions can help you over time.

## VI. Medication considerations

- There is currently no medication to treat tinnitus.
- Sometimes tinnitus occurs after starting or stopping a medication. If this happens, talk to the provider who prescribed the medication. Do not stop taking this medication without speaking to your provider.

## VII. Next steps, key takeaways

- Talk to your healthcare provider or audiologist about how tinnitus affects your life.
- Talk to your provider about your other health conditions and medications.
- Take action and practice coping skills to live better with tinnitus.
- Manage your expectations.
- Focus on health and wellness.

### For more information

National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research:

<https://www.ncrar.research.va.gov/ForVets/Index.asp>

Defense Health Agency Hearing Center of Excellence:

<https://hearing.health.mil/>

American Tinnitus Association:

<https://www.ata.org/>

National Institutes of Health:

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/health/hearing/NIDCD-Tinnitus.pdf>