

Tinnitus - lifestyle adjustments can help

When you first develop tinnitus, it is normal to experience frequent mood swings, anxiety, depression and extreme distress. In time, you **can** learn to manage your tinnitus and reduce the negative emotional effects it has on you.

In the early stages

When you first learn you have tinnitus:

- Consult your doctor to reassure yourself that you do not have an underlying medical condition.
- Learn all you can about tinnitus. You can find a lot of literature through the Tinnitus Association of Victoria.
- Accept that you have tinnitus. Once you have done this, you are halfway to mastering it.
- Understand that you will be very tired and depressed in the early stages.

Adjusting your lifestyle

Exposure to loud noise

It is advisable to:

- Avoid loud nightclubs and entertainment venues - or at least use ear protection.
- Use ear muffs or ear protection when mowing the lawn or using loud machinery, such as a chainsaw.

Avoid stress and fatigue

Stress and fatigue can make tinnitus worse. It will help if you:

- Stay as calm as you can - becoming agitated about your tinnitus may make it worse.
- Develop relaxation techniques and activities that help you relax.
- Try to avoid stressful situations.
- Think positively - feeling negative and angry can aggravate the problem.

Adjust your diet

Some foods and drinks can increase tinnitus. It will be helpful if you can reduce your intake of:

- Caffeinated foods and drinks - such as chocolate, tea and cola drinks. You should not drink more than six cups of coffee per day.
- Quinine (in tonic water).
- Red wine.
- Spicy foods.

You do not have to avoid these items altogether. Just be aware they may temporarily increase your tinnitus.

Quit smoking

Smoking narrows the blood vessels which supply vital oxygen to your ears and their sensory cells. You will be better able to manage your tinnitus if you quit smoking.

Ask your doctor about any medications you take

Some prescription and non-prescription medications can make tinnitus worse. Whenever your doctor prescribes medication for you, ask whether the drug has the side effect of tinnitus. If it has, ask if there are alternative medications you can use.

Keep physically and mentally active

Try and take up:

- Exercise - walking is very beneficial.
- Hobbies or interests that you enjoy and can 'lose yourself' in.

Even if your tinnitus prevents you from working, try to keep as physically and mentally active as possible. Do not withdraw from life.

Find the best ways to mask your tinnitus

Fall back on masking techniques during the inevitable bad periods that accompany tinnitus. Examples include:

- Surrounding yourself with ambient and environmental noise; for example, playing the radio softly.
- Playing tapes with soothing sounds; for example, rain falling on the roof or the ocean surf.

Carbohydrates may be helpful

Carbohydrate rich meals - for example pasta, followed by cake - can have a calming or sedating effect, which can be helpful. However, give yourself time to digest your meal before you go to bed to help avoid a disturbed sleep.

Where to get help

- Tinnitus Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9770 6075
- Your doctor.

Things to remember

- There is a lot you can do to help manage your tinnitus.
- Avoid stress and anxiety to help reduce the impact of tinnitus.
- Changing your diet may help.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tinnitus Association of Victoria

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