

## Tinnitus in Children

### What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is the sensation of sound when there is no external source to that sound. These sounds are thought to be generated within the brain or hearing pathway. Tinnitus is common in adults but also occurs in children. Research suggests 12-36% of children might experience tinnitus. It is more common when a child has a hearing loss. Research suggests children who have tinnitus are rarely bothered by it.

### What causes tinnitus?

There is often no single identifiable cause to tinnitus. It can be associated with exposure to loud sounds, ear infections, hearing loss, poor sleep quality or as a side-effect of some medicines. Tinnitus can also be triggered by an upsetting or stressful experience such as bereavement or exams. Stress and anxiety often affect tinnitus as we go into 'high alert mode'. Our senses become heightened and we become more aware of what we can hear.

### What does it sound like?

There is not one particular sound to tinnitus. Many people hear ringing, while others hear whistling, buzzing, humming or even music. The sounds may vary in duration, loudness, pitch or location. Some people have always experienced tinnitus and so may think that everyone hears these sounds. This is why some children may never mention it. Tinnitus is often more noticeable when it is quiet, for example at bedtime.

### Is there a cure?

Current research indicates that tinnitus is not a disease you can cure, but rather a symptom you can manage.

Management techniques might not remove the tinnitus entirely, but often reduce the impact that the tinnitus has on everyday life. In many cases the tinnitus will eventually go away or reduce to a more tolerable level, especially with good management.

### What can I do to help my child?

- Listening, talking, and reassuring your child about their tinnitus is often helpful.
- Tinnitus is often made worse by worry and anxiety. Reassure your child and try to address any general concerns that they may have.
- Help your child to relax by practicing breathing exercises, relaxation, or mindfulness techniques. There are many resources available on YouTube or Spotify for this.
- Sleep deprivation can worsen tinnitus and anxiety, therefore helping your child to develop a good sleep routine is crucial. Reducing the use of screens, sugar, and caffeine intake, particularly on the run-up to bedtime will help.
- Introducing quiet music, natural sounds, e.g. sea, rain noise etc, or low-level sound generators may help divert your child's attention away from the tinnitus. These are available on apps, some of which are free of charge.
- If your child has a hearing loss, wearing their hearing aids can help distract them from their tinnitus by providing them with more external sound.

- Tinnitus UK has some resources and activity booklets aimed at children to help them talk about tinnitus.

## Sources of information

<https://tinnitus.org.uk>

## Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net).

## Hand hygiene

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After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

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The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

Paediatric Audiology

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