

## Tinnitus Patient Information Sheet

### **What is Tinnitus?**

Tinnitus is the name given to the condition of noises 'in the ears' and/or 'in the head' with no external source. Tinnitus noises are described variously as ringing, whistling, buzzing and humming.

### **What causes tinnitus?**

Tinnitus is not a disease or an illness, it is a symptom generated within a person's own auditory/hearing pathways. Although it is often assumed that tinnitus occurs as a result of disease of the ears, this is often not the case. The precise cause of tinnitus is still not fully understood but tinnitus can be associated with

- Noise exposure - [Exposure to loud noises can damage and even destroy hair cells](#), called cilia, in the inner ear. Once damaged, these hair cells cannot be renewed or replaced.
- Ototoxicity - [Some medications are ototoxic](#), that is, the medications are toxic to the ear. Other medications will produce tinnitus as a side effect without damaging the inner ear. Dr Ho will require a list of all current medications. He will also need to know the exact name and dosage of all medications started just prior to the start of your tinnitus.
- Head trauma - Physical trauma to the head and neck can induce tinnitus.
- Certain types of tumors
- Cardiovascular disease
- Meniere's disease

What can the Dr. Ho do to manage your tinnitus ?

- Try to find a cause for your tinnitus if one exists. Often no cause is found. The questionnaire that you fill out will help him with this.
- The investigations that maybe indicated are often done to rule out significant diseases which may be associated with your tinnitus. Reassurance that your tinnitus is not associated with significant ear disease or a general condition that may limit your quality of life is often a large part of his role. He may request for several blood tests and even at times a CT or an MRI scan.
  - Generally, he will only request for a CT or an MRI scan if your tinnitus is:
    - only on one side
    - if your hearing loss is significantly worse on one side.
    - pulsatile ie. Follows your heartbeat/pulse.
- If your tinnitus is associated with hearing loss than offering you advice on how to treat your hearing loss.
- In the vast majority of cases, there is no cure for tinnitus. If in the rare occasion that a specific cause is found he will discuss the treatment options with you.
- He can offer you advice on what sort of treatments have been shown to work.

- If in the rare occasion that a specific medical condition is found to be associated with your tinnitus, he will discuss the treatment options with you. Occasionally only preventative advice is given. Usually, medical or surgical treatment does not cure tinnitus but can potentially make it worse.
- If you have a hearing loss he will advise you on a hearing aid if that is appropriate as a hearing aid has been shown to not only improve your hearing but it can also treat your

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- tinnitus by masking it out. He will direct you to a hearing aid clinic where an audiologist can help you.
- If your hearing is normal, he will suggest sound treatment by way of a tinnitus masker or white noise generator. There are other tinnitus maskers on the market and information of them can be sought by going to several recommended websites such as
  - British tinnitus association at their website <http://www.tinnitus.org.uk>
  - Tinnitus association of Canada (the google search engine will be able to get you there)
- Ultimately if your tinnitus is severely affecting you the option of tinnitus retraining therapy and counselling will be discussed with you. This often involves further treatment with a psychologist or an audiologist with training in tinnitus retraining therapy/counseling. There is currently no publicly funded tinnitus retraining therapy in Alberta. Any tinnitus retraining therapy undertaken will incur a financial cost which will be between the therapist and you.