

CAN ANYONE HELP ME WITH EAR RINGING?

In our previous column we discussed the essentials to successful hearing loss treatment. In today's column we want to introduce the keys to successful tinnitus treatment. Tinnitus is often referred to as ringing in the ears and is thought to be associated with hearing loss. Research suggests nearly 70% of those with hearing loss report having tinnitus and 80% of those with tinnitus report having hearing loss. Tinnitus also appears to impact older adults the most. As audiologist Dr. Kochkin's, the Executive Director of the Better Hearing Institute suggests, tinnitus is most pronounced in the 55-84 age category; this age category is also most likely to report hearing loss.



The tinnitus patient may report their tinnitus as intermittent or constant, high pitch or low pitch, rhythmic or steady, in one ear or two ears or even just experienced somewhere in the head. Tinnitus can affect anyone. In fact, many famous people have reported tinnitus, including Bob Dylan, Bill Clinton, Pete Townsend and Phil Collins.

The suffering of a tinnitus patient can range from a mild annoyance to debilitating, chronic pain. The most common grievances attributed to tinnitus are disruptions in sleep, difficulties with concentration or understanding speech, depression, despair, drug dependence, and headaches. Sleep can be a significant concern for the tinnitus patient and some research even indicates that the severity of tinnitus increases with sleep difficulties.

Finally, the fact that tinnitus is phantom in nature, meaning that it is a sound that is heard by the sufferer but there is no external sound in the environment creates additional stress for the tinnitus patient. All too often a significant other, family or friend cannot relate to the suffering experienced by someone with tinnitus because they cannot see what is causing their pain. Clearly, tinnitus patients require support, treatment, and strategies to help improve their quality of life.

A common misconception is that there is no treatment for tinnitus. While there is currently no cure, there are many forms of successful treatment. Successful treatment is critical as 10-25% of the population that seeks medical attention for tinnitus needs support for their suffering.

Audiologist Calvin Staples at Grand River Hearing Centre believes there are many therapies that can help a tinnitus sufferer and no one therapy or approach works for everyone. The best approach is one that is multifaceted. Tinnitus treatments are not "one size fits all," says Staples. As with his hearing loss patients, Staples believes tinnitus patients require an individualized patient-centred treatment plan.

"The need for an engaged personal evidenced based approach is essential for a tinnitus patient because unsuccessful treatment can exacerbate the patient's tinnitus," says Staples. Research suggests that those who try one form of treatment and are unsuccessful will often shy away from additional treatments or will become susceptible for failure with future treatments. Staples believes that an Audiologist can provide significant help to a tinnitus patient, but that they should be specifically trained in one of the accepted forms of tinnitus therapy. He also believes that tinnitus treatment should be dynamic and constantly adapting as research is continuing to bring new developments.

Tinnitus can be successfully assessed and treated. However, a detailed medical, audiological, and physical assessment of the patient is necessary prior to beginning any treatment. At Grand River Hearing Centre, Audiologist Calvin Staples evaluates the patient for all potential triggers or causes of their tinnitus to ensure the most successful treatment plan is in place; as the old adage goes: "if you know how it works, you know how to fix it." Staples returns to his original position that the key to successful treatment is ensuring the therapist is trained, competent and is accessing the necessary allied health professionals as necessary. Please contact Grand River Hearing Centre should you have any tinnitus or hearing related concerns.

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Grand River Hearing Centre • Conrad Medical Centre
Calvin Staples, Audiologist and Renée Schafer, Hearing Instrument Specialist
16 Andrew Street, Kitchener • (519) 804-9233
<http://www.grandriverhearing.ca>