

Tackling Tinnitus

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Do you suffer from ringing in the ears? You're not alone! The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) estimates that over 20 million Americans experience chronic ringing in the ears, known as tinnitus (pronounced "TIN-a-tus" or "Tin-EYE-tus"). Tinnitus is an annoying and sometimes debilitating condition, commonly defined as the perception of noise in one or both ears when no sound is actually present. Tinnitus is usually described as a high-pitched ringing, but it might also be perceived as roaring, clicking, hissing or buzzing. The condition can be mild, intermittent, or so severe that it interferes with your sleep, concentration, and enjoyment of daily life.

A recent analysis of data collected as part of the National Health Interview Survey indicated that noise-exposed workers in the United States are 3 times more likely to report suffering from tinnitus than their non-noise-exposed counterparts. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, tinnitus and hearing loss are the top two service-connected disabilities for U.S. service members. Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have been exposed to a number of hazards known to cause hearing loss and tinnitus, including loud noise, blasts/explosions, and ototoxic chemicals. Service members who have suffered a traumatic brain injury are 3 times more likely to experience tinnitus than other veterans. Those exposed to solvents, a class of ototoxic chemicals, are twice as likely to report ringing in the ears.



Photo credit - USAF Alejandro Pena

Tinnitus itself is not a disease. Instead, it can be a sign that something is wrong with the outer, middle or inner ear, the auditory nerve, or parts of the brain that process sound. Noise exposure, acoustic trauma, exposure to chemicals, and ear diseases/infections are some of the most common causes of tinnitus. Complicating its diagnosis and treatment, tinnitus has many other causes as well, including disorders of the heart/circulatory system, stress, hormone changes, and as a side effect of medications, smoking, or too much salt or caffeine. Sometimes the cause of tinnitus is unknown.

So what can a person experiencing tinnitus do about this annoying and on occasion even incapacitating condition? Follow our **Top Tips** and check out **Resources** listed below. And of course, when it comes to hearing protection, we've got you covered. [Contact CavCom](#) to learn more about our many solutions for controlling noise on and off the job.

Top Tips for Tackling Tinnitus

- **Check with a medical professional.** The first step in managing tinnitus is to get an evaluation. See your primary care doctor to determine if a medical condition or a medication may be causing or aggravating the ringing. If needed, you will be referred for a complete audiological and medical examination to establish if there is an underlying ear or hearing problem. Although there often is no cure for long-term tinnitus, there are treatments and therapies that can help people cope with the annoyance and frustration of this condition.
- **Protect your hearing.** Because noise is a leading cause of tinnitus, you can reduce the likelihood of developing or worsening tinnitus by limiting the amount of time you spend around loud noise and by wearing well-fitted and effective hearing protectors when needed. There are many styles and options for hearing protectors that will reduce the noise sufficiently while still providing you comfort, convenience, compatibility with your other PPE, and the ability to communicate with those around you.
- **Consider sound maskers.** You'll find a wide array of good (and some not so good) devices for sale that can help you manage tinnitus. These include wearable or tabletop sound generators specifically made to mask tinnitus, or can be as simple as using fans or quiet recorded sounds to help. Popular masking sounds are "white noise" (a soft "shhhhhh"), random tones, music, or pleasant nature sounds such as ocean waves, waterfalls, rain, or other natural soundscapes. Particularly if your tinnitus is mild, this might be all you need to get through a busy work day or to fall asleep at night when the house is quiet and your tinnitus seems most noticeable.
- **Use cognitive tools.** If your tinnitus is persistent and has no medical treatment available, counseling and behavioral therapy techniques can help you learn to live with the condition. You might also learn some things on your own to make the noise less noticeable, to help you relax during the day, or to fall asleep more easily.
- **If you have a hearing aid, wear it.** For people with hearing loss and tinnitus, hearing aids or cochlear implants often help with both.

Mayo Clinic Minute: Is tinnitus causing that ringing in your ear?

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For more information/resources:

- [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#) - Tinnitus Topic Page
- [American Tinnitus Association \(ATA\)](#)
- [Department of Defense Hearing Center of Excellence](#) - Tinnitus Topic Page
- [NIOSH Press Release \(2016\)](#) Putting an Ear to the Ground: NIOSH Study looks at Prevalence of Hearing Difficulty and Tinnitus among Workers
- [Frequent use of over-the-counter analgesics associated with risk of tinnitus \(2022\)](#). Brigham and Women's Hospital News Release, 2-9-22.