

# Bothersome tinnitus linked to neuroticism

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People with 'neurotic' tendencies are more likely to be troubled by their tinnitus, a new study involving researchers at The University of Nottingham, has found.

The research, led by academics at the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Nottingham Hearing Biomedical Research Unit, found that those who were lonely, worried or anxious, miserable or experiencing [mood swings](#) were more likely to report their [tinnitus](#) as being bothersome.

The results suggest that those people with a more sensitive nature may be less able to cope with the symptoms of their hearing condition.

Dr Abby McCormack, who led the study, said: "It is likely that personality factors play an important role in the perception and management of tinnitus, possibly by influencing the tendency to be

aware of it. Therefore treatment should be tailored for individual [personality types](#) to help people cope with their condition."

Tinnitus is the perception of sounds in the head or ears, usually described by sufferers as a ringing, buzzing or whistling.

It can either be caused by sounds generated by internal [biological activity](#), known as objective tinnitus, or caused by abnormal [brain activity](#) not formed by sounds, known as subjective tinnitus.

Subjective tinnitus is much more common, affecting up to an estimated 20 per cent of the UK population. Of those sufferers, around five per cent report that it has a severe impact on their lives, leading to [sleep disorders](#), concentration difficulties and a higher incidence of [anxiety and depression](#).

However, not all those affected by tinnitus experience the same amount of distress and there is growing evidence to suggest that the perception of the severity of tinnitus is closely linked to a patient's [personality traits](#) and the way they handle their condition.

The Nottingham study aimed to gather more up to date information on how common tinnitus is among the UK population, while also examining the link between the perception of its severity and 'neuroticism', or the tendency to experiencing negative or distressing emotions.

It used information collected from more than 500,000 people aged between 40 and 69 years old between the years 2006 and 2010 as part of the UK Biobank, which was established as a resource for the study of the genetic, environmental and lifestyle causes of common diseases.

As part of the range of questions which Biobank participants answered were those relating to both hearing and personality factors and the study

also took into account factors including sex, age and whether participants were from a deprived demographic.

The results showed that tinnitus affected around 16 per cent of participants and was more prevalent in men than in women.

However, while men were more likely to experience tinnitus, women were more likely to find it bothersome.

The study found that people who were more prone to being neurotic were more likely to be distressed by their tinnitus.

Loneliness was the most significant factor of neuroticism that was associated with bothersome tinnitus, possibly because many sufferers may withdraw from social situations and experience feelings of isolation.

The findings could help health professionals in managing the care of tinnitus patients in the future, as it suggests that psychological approaches could be beneficial when delivered over the longer term.

**More information:** [www.sciencedirect.com/science/...  
ii/S0022399913003358](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0022399913003358)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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