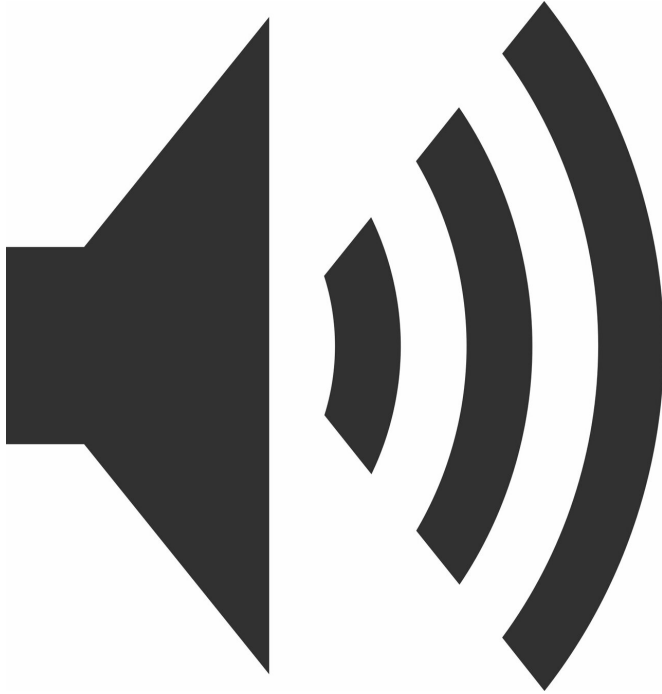


Is tinnitus causing that ringing in your ear?

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Have you ever experienced a constant ringing in your ears that you can't pinpoint the cause? It might be tinnitus ('tin-ni-tus) - the sensation of hearing a sound when no external sound is present. In most cases, tinnitus can be managed, but for some, it's a chronic condition that can affect sleep and everyday function. Fortunately, there are options to reduce its effects.

About 1 in 5 people experience the perception of noise or ringing in the [ears](#). It's called [tinnitus](#). Dr. Gayla Poling is the director of Diagnostic Audiology at Mayo Clinic. She says tinnitus can be perceived a myriad of ways: ringing, buzzing, whistling, a cracking, a chirping. But why?

"Ninety percent of those with tinnitus have [hearing loss](#). So that's usually where we start as a source or a reason for the tinnitus."

Hearing loss can be age-related, come from a one-time exposure, or exposure to loud sounds over a lifetime. Poling says the tiny hairs in our inner ear may play a role.

"Those little [hair cells](#) in our inner ear are really delicate structures. That's what is actually damaged with noise exposure, or wear and tear on your ears across your life span. So those damaged hair cells, might be the reason or part of the cause for tinnitus for some."

Poling says there's no scientifically proven cure for tinnitus, but there are treatment and management options.

"That can be something as simple as getting a [hearing](#) aid to treating the hearing loss. And once you treat that, then you find that the tinnitus and the perception of that tinnitus is reduced."

Other options include using a sound generator or a fan at night. And then there are more advanced treatments.

"There's something called "tinnitus retraining therapy." There are more ear-level masking devices where you can hear sounds throughout the day, too, that are more distracting."

If ringing in your ears bothers you, start by seeing your [health care provider](#) for a hearing test.

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