

## HEARING MATTERS

### ***What's that noise in my ear?***

#### What is tinnitus?

Do you have a constant or frequent ringing, hissing, buzzing, humming, chirping, or other noise in your ear or head? If you do, you probably have tinnitus. Tinnitus is not generated by any outside noise source and, in most cases, it is only heard by the person with the disorder. According to a recent press release from the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, over 360, 000 Canadians are affected by tinnitus. Not everyone who is hard of hearing has tinnitus and one can have tinnitus and not be hard of hearing.

#### Types of tinnitus

Most people with tinnitus hear only one sound but some people have reported that they hear a mixture of sounds or tones. A constant ringing in the ear seems to be the most prevalent form but there are many other sounds that tinnitus sufferers experience. Some have compared it to snakes hissing; others have compared it to a hum of a motor. At a recent tinnitus workshop I attended, one lady compared her tinnitus to the sounds of birds chirping. Sometimes the chirping was very low but when it got louder, she would say the birds were hungry and needed to be fed.

#### Causes of tinnitus

Tinnitus can be caused by stress or shock. Exposure to loud noises, trauma to the ears or head, and stress due to depression or anxiety are all possible causes. In rare cases, tinnitus can be caused by a medical disorder such as a tumour affecting the brain or ear.

#### Coping with tinnitus

For most people with tinnitus, the symptoms never go away. They have to learn to live with the sounds inside their heads but there are ways to cope. A hearing aid can increase the sound of background noises thus lessening the awareness of tinnitus. "Maskers" are worn like hearing aids and they produce a flow of sound like that of a fan which can mask the sound produced by tinnitus or blend in with it. Relaxation therapy can help to take the person's

mind of the sound and focus it on something else. Please keep in mind that what works for one person may not work for another.

### Seek medical advice

If you think you have tinnitus, you should see your doctor. You need to be sure that what you think is tinnitus is not something more serious.

### For further information

If you desire more information about tinnitus or other hearing matters, go to the following websites and click on the appropriate links:

(Provincial Chapter of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association)

[www.chha-nl.nl.ca](http://www.chha-nl.nl.ca)

(National Office of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association)

[www.chha.ca/chha](http://www.chha.ca/chha)

### Final thoughts

Personally I find that if my surroundings are very quiet, my tinnitus appears louder than usual. Therefore, I try to have some background noise around me such as music playing or the television turned on. What I find most effective is to occupy myself with an activity so as not to pay attention to the noise in my ear. Working on a hobby, reading, exercising, and playing games helps me to focus less on my tinnitus.

We must take control of our tinnitus and not let tinnitus control us.

Until next time, protect your hearing.