**What's That Ringing I Hear?**

Taking the necessary steps to tackle tinnitus

Do you experience a perception of sound in your ears or head when others tell you that no sound is present? It could be caused by tinnitus ... and you're not alone. About 30 million Americans of all ages experience tinnitus to some extent. Most people describe it as a ringing, but others say it is a swooshing, roaring or other type of noise. It can be constant or it can come and go. Causes of tinnitus range from the very simple (like ear wax or the effects of some medications) to the very serious (like slow-growing tumors). While the serious causes are relatively rare, it is important to discuss them with your physician to rule them out. Additionally, your doctor may be able to remedy some of the simpler causes.

The most common cause of tinnitus is damage to the nerve of hearing. This is identified through a hearing test, which your physician can review with you. The damaged portion of the nerve not only produces a noise that you don't want to hear, it also does not perceive the sounds that you should hear. There are many possible causes of tinnitus and for some there is no cure, but often it can be treated so the severity is lessened. Other times it's as simple as removing wax from the ear drum. For many people tinnitus is a bit like a candle in a room. If no other lights are on, it becomes the focal point. When the lights come on, the light from the candle is hardly noticed. If you are in a room with no sound, the tinnitus may sound much louder, just like the candle that seems brighter in a room with no other light. When you are hearing other sounds, the tinnitus becomes less noticeable. Some people use radios, fans or other sounds to cover the annoyance of the tinnitus with something less objectionable.

When you are hearing other sounds, the tinnitus becomes less noticeable. Some people use radios, fans or other sounds to cover the annoyance of the tinnitus with something less objectionable. Others gain relief from their tinnitus simply by using hearing aids. Bringing to the normal sounds of life, you not only improve your ability to communicate, you make your tinnitus less noticeable.

A good resource is the American Tinnitus Association website (www.ata.org), which reviews causes and current treatments for tinnitus. If you are experiencing tinnitus or would like more information, contact your physician or audiologist.

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