

# Health Tips

Your Good Health Information From eDocAmerica

with

Dr. D



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## Health Tip: What can I do about this ringing in my ears?

"To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells - From the jingling and the  
tinkling of the bells"

Edgar Allen Poe: The Bells

My introduction to the word "tinnitus" occurred while taking the Medical College Admissions Test. I had absolutely no idea what it meant, but having read a fair amount of Edgar Allen Poe, I made the connection between "ringing in the ears" with the "tintinnabulation" of the silver bells from one of his poems. Even today, as I re-read The Bells, his disturbing description of the incessant----"bells, bells, bells, bells, bells..." seems to accurately describe what many people with tinnitus experience.



**What is tinnitus?** Tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, is a symptom that is experienced by up to 12 million people in the United States. Of these, at least 1 million experience it so severely that it interferes with their daily activities. People with severe cases of tinnitus may find it difficult to hear, work, or even sleep. Actually, tinnitus is not always described as ringing. Other designations include roaring, clicking, hissing or buzzing.

**What causes tinnitus?** The causes of tinnitus include hearing loss, exposure to loud noises, and a side effect of some 200 different medications. It may be surprising to some to learn that aspirin is one of the medicines most likely to cause tinnitus. It can also be a symptom of other health problems, such as allergies, anemia, arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, tumors (e.g. acoustic neuroma) and heart problems.

**What should I do about my tinnitus?** Those with the recent onset of tinnitus should undergo medical evaluation. It is important to establish the underlying cause, since it can be associated with serious medical conditions. In many cases, however, no specific cause is found. This is particularly true when tinnitus is due to hearing loss related to aging (presbycusis). In some instances a fairly minor cause such as wax accumulation in the ear canal is found and treatment can be curative.

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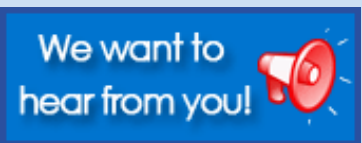
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**What can be done for tinnitus?** When no specific cause for tinnitus is found, treatment is aimed at managing the symptoms. These measures include:

**Hearing aids**---Use of a hearing aid makes it easier to hear necessary sounds and less likely to notice the tinnitus.

**Maskers**---These are electronic devices that use sound to make tinnitus less noticeable. Some are small enough to fit into the ear. Since tinnitus can be particularly troublesome when attempting to sleep, listening to static at a low volume on the radio or using bedside white noise device can help also.

**Medications**---Medications including certain anticonvulsants, allergy medications and anti-anxiety medications have been used successfully in treating tinnitus.

**Self-care measures**---Factors that can make tinnitus worse and should be avoided include smoking, alcohol, and caffeine. Those who are regularly exposed to loud noise at home or at work should wear ear plugs or special earmuffs to protect their hearing and keep their tinnitus from getting worse.

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