



How Much Do You Know About Tinnitus?

What is Tinnitus?

- Tinnitus refers to the perception of sound without an external acoustic source
- According to data from Western countries, one out of every five adults has experienced tinnitus at some point
- Tinnitus can be classified into:
 - (1) “Objective Tinnitus” : this is similar to the sound of arterial pulse, and can be heard by others with a stethoscope
 - (2) “Subjective Tinnitus” : this is only perceived by the patient alone, and cannot be heard by others. It is similar to the high-pitched noises emitted by television or made by wind

Why Do We Have Tinnitus?

- “Objective Tinnitus” is caused by problems in arteries in the neck, Eustachian tube, middle ears or temporomandibular joint (i.e. the jaw)
- “Subjective Tinnitus” principally involves the perception of sound generated by the spontaneous physiological activities of inner ears and auditory nervous system. Generally, healthy ears can occasionally experience “subjective tinnitus” too, such as hearing a buzzing sound in a very quiet environment or occasionally experience tinnitus for a few seconds. Such cases are very common
- Usually, ambient noises in daily situations are enough to mask tinnitus. However, as sufferers of hearing loss (particularly sensorineural hearing loss) receive less external sound, their tinnitus will be more obvious and persistent
- Tinnitus will be exacerbated by the following factors: exposure to loud noises for a long time, ageing of auditory organs, diseases of the inner ears such as Meniere's disease, pathological changes in auditory nervous system such as acoustic neuroma, abuse of certain drugs e.g. aspirin
- Anxiety and nervousness may make us more sensitive to tinnitus and produce stronger emotional reactions

How to Prevent Tinnitus?

- Loud noise can cause discomfort and tinnitus. Try not to stay too long in noisy places such as video game centres, discos, and karaoke boxes. Avoid toys that generate extreme loud sound e.g. firecrackers. Protect your ears from sources of

loud noises e.g. construction sites and low flying aircrafts by covering your ears with hands or using protective devices

- Using earphones for listening to loud music for a long period of time can damage your hearing. Avoid using portable music players in noisy environment. Try to adjust your player to a volume setting at or lower than “medium” and limit the listening time to 60 minutes or less
- Take medicine only under the advice of doctors and pharmacists. Overdose of some drugs e.g. aspirin can be damaging to hearing and cause tinnitus

What Can We Do With Tinnitus?

- If you suffer from tinnitus, please consult a doctor as soon as possible. If you also suffer from dizziness, pressure in your ears or unilateral hearing loss in addition to tinnitus, you should consult a doctor immediately to prevent further impairment to your hearing system
- If your tinnitus is caused by hearing loss, wearing hearing aids prescribed by an audiologist may improve your perception of external sound and reduce the impact of tinnitus effectively
- An excessively quiet environment may exacerbate tinnitus. However, low-volume broad band sound (such as the sound of raining, waves or noises similar to a badly-tuned radio) may help mask tinnitus. If you cannot sleep because of tinnitus, you may try playing discs or cassette tapes containing sounds of raining, running water or waves, which may help you relax and reduce the impact of tinnitus

☺ If your tinnitus is confirmed not to be caused by hearing loss or diseases, you can relax and treat it lightly and optimistically.

