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HEALTHCARE

Insights



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SILENCING TINNITUS

Treatment options
are available

SILENCING TINNITUS

TREATMENT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE

50
million
have experienced
tinnitus



When it comes to Tinnitus treatment, HOMELINK follows the guidelines of the American Academy of Audiology and the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgeons.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more than 50 million people in the United States have reported experiencing tinnitus, the perception of sound without an external source. It is often described as hissing, roaring, clicking, or buzzing, occurring on one or both sides of the head. It is also often excruciating.

Actor William Shatner became afflicted while filming the 1967 *Star Trek* episode “Arena,” standing too close to a special effects explosion. “There were days when I didn’t know how I would survive the agony,” he said. “I was so tormented by the screeching in my head I really thought I would not be able to go on.” Shatner eventually sought treatment, something only about 20 percent do today.

The low percentage of individuals seeking treatment might be because tinnitus has more than one cause. Tinnitus, itself, is a symptom and not a condition. The phantom sounds can

happen because of hearing loss, circulatory system disorders, Meniere’s disease, and other medical conditions. Some medications are also associated with tinnitus. No matter the cause, treatment is available.

Identification

Evaluation of tinnitus begins with a *physical exam* by an otolaryngologist, commonly called an ENT (ear, nose and throat physician). A physical exam—evaluates not only the tinnitus but other accompanying complaints such as insomnia, anxiety, depression, and difficulty concentrating.

Next, a *diagnostic hearing evaluation* by an audiologist, which identifies any hearing loss that may be contributing to the tinnitus. Hearing aids and sound generators are a couple of the common solutions to treat tinnitus.

In addition to the tone and speech tests, you can expect to have other tests of your hearing system, such as:

- ✓ **Uncomfortable loudness level test** – identifies the loudest sound at various pitches that can be tolerated. Results help to set the limits of volume for hearing aids or other sound generators.
- ✓ **Tympanometry** – a test of the tympanic membrane and the middle ear. Occasionally, middle ear disorders such as allergies and sinusitis may be discovered during the physical exam. In these cases, medical treatment by an ENT can provide relief of some or all of the tinnitus.
- ✓ **Otoacoustic emissions** – a test of the inner ear system. This test provides information about the health of the inner hair cells that transmit sound to the auditory nerve.
- ✓ **Acoustic reflex and acoustic decay tests** – measures the response of the auditory nerve.
- ✓ **Tinnitus matching** – used to identify the approximate pitch and volume of the sound being perceived. For some individuals, a single pitch can be identified. For others, the pitch and loudness are reported to be both variable and unpredictable in onset.

Treatment Options

Many times, demystifying tinnitus provides relief from anxiety that in turn allows a person to begin to accept and ignore the phantom sound. [Here is a list of resources you can provide your injured workers.](#)

- ✓ American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgeons (AAOHNS) www.entnet.org
- ✓ American Academy of Audiology (AAA) www.audiology.org
- ✓ American Tinnitus Association (ATA) www.ata.org
- ✓ Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) www.hearingloss.org
- ✓ American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) www.asha.org
- ✓ Tinnitus Research Initiative Foundation (TRI) www.tinnitusresearch.org

HOMELINK promotes no-cost options as a solution for treating tinnitus. In some cases, treatment of hearing loss with standard hearing aids provides relief. In fact, most hearing aid manufacturers can include a tinnitus-masking circuit in the hearing aid at no additional cost, and the audiologist can program the hearing aids to both treat the hearing loss and the tinnitus.

Silence is not an ideal situation for those suffering from tinnitus. Contact the HOMELINK Staff Doctor of Audiology for more information about Smart Phone Apps, sound pillows and the latest information on tinnitus retraining therapies.

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HOMELINK

800-482-1993 | VGMHOMELINK.com

1111 West San Marnan Drive
Waterloo, IA 50701



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