

Tinnitus & Hyperacusis:

Tinnitus is commonly known as a ringing in the ears. However, tinnitus can also take the form of a variety of other sounds such as crickets, the ocean, roaring, buzzing, etc. Tinnitus affects 17% of the general population. Approximately 75% of those experiencing tinnitus are not bothered by it. For the remaining 25%, their tinnitus can negatively impact their life. Many patients are told they have to “learn to live with it.” This is not true. There are options to decrease a patient’s perception of tinnitus.

Hyperacusis is a decreased tolerance for sound. Approximately 40% of patients with tinnitus can also experience hyperacusis. Patients with hyperacusis can experience physical pain and discomfort to every day sounds. Hyperacusis is treated through the use of sound therapy to restore normal sensitivity to sound.

Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) was developed by Pawel Jastreboff, Ph.D. and is based on his neurophysiological model of tinnitus. This method of treatment requires two components – directive counseling and sound therapy.

The goal is to make tinnitus no longer perceivable unless the patient intentionally focuses on it. Even when it is perceivable it is no longer bothersome. Therapy addresses both the perception and reaction to the tinnitus. TRT typically requires a 9-18 month commitment.

Tinnitus Retraining Therapy consists of:

Directive counseling focuses on education about tinnitus/hyperacusis and the interactions with other systems in the body.

Sound therapy is used to help the brain get accustomed to the sound of the tinnitus especially in quiet when it is more noticeable. This may include environmental sound enrichment, the use of ear level sound generators (SG), the use of hearing aids (HA), or the use of combination instruments (SG + HA in one unit). The exact treatment is based on the initial diagnostic evaluation, patient's preference, and lifestyle demands.

What are some tips for managing tinnitus on my own?

1. **Avoid Silence** – use environmental sounds such as relaxing music, sound machines, or other soothing sounds to reduce the contrast between silence and your tinnitus
2. **Reduce Stress** – Engage in activities that can reduce anxiety/stress such as exercise, yoga, etc.

3. **Get plenty of Sleep** – Your body needs adequate rest. Use soothing environmental sounds at your bedside if needed to help you fall and stay asleep. No napping if you have trouble sleeping through the night.
4. **Protect your ears** – Use hearing protection when around loud sounds to prevent further damage in the auditory system.
5. **Don't panic** – There are effective treatment options for decreasing your perception of your tinnitus.
6. **Pursue education about tinnitus** – Knowledge can ease anxiety. Schedule an initial consultation to increase your understanding of tinnitus.