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Tinnitus

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Definition

Tinnitus is usually described as a ringing or other persisting noise in the ear such as a buzzing, hissing, whistling, roaring, or even clicking sound. It can be present in one or both ears. Tinnitus can be intermittent or continuous. In the latter case, this phantom sound can create great distress in the sufferer. Tinnitus is not itself a disease, but a symptom resulting from a range of underlying causes, including nerve damage from trauma or other lesions, inner ear damage, ear infections, foreign objects or wax in the ear, nose allergies that prevent (or induce) fluid drain and cause wax buildup, and injury from loud noises.

Tinnitus is also a side effect of some oral medications, such as aspirin, and may also result from an abnormally low level of serotonin activity. In many cases, however, no underlying physical cause can be identified. It is most typically associated with some hearing loss, but tinnitus can also occur alone.

While the most effective treatment for tinnitus is elimination of the underlying cause, the true etiology may be difficult to ascertain. Tinnitus might respond to drug therapy, vitamin therapy, biofeedback, hypnosis, and tinnitus maskers. Speech-language-hearing specialists can provide strategies for managing tinnitus, and self-help groups may also be effective.

References and Readings

Anderson, G., Baguley, D., McKenna, L., & McFerran, D. (2005). *Tinnitus: A multidisciplinary approach*. New York: Wiley.