

Tinnitus goes mainstream

Tinnitus exists in virtually every ear with hearing loss and some without. Approximately 50 million people experience tinnitus. It can range from mild and slightly annoying to raging and incredibly debilitating. No cure or even guaranteed treatment exists but often Tinnitus patients are willing to try anything.

Although no known cause exists some things that have been linked to causing tinnitus are noise trauma, hearing loss, head & neck injury, disease or health problems and medication side effects. Aside from knowing exactly what is causing the tinnitus and being able to treat the cause most of the time there is no procedure or medication that will make the tinnitus or noise go away. The goal is to attempt to provide relief which is often accomplished utilizing counseling on what will exacerbate the tinnitus. These may include stress or fatigue, consistent noise exposure, use of aspirin in high doses, alcohol use, caffeine use, tobacco, sodium and how to maintain a lifestyle that will provide the most relief. The use of a sound therapy via a device such as amplification or dedicated tinnitus device or program is often added to the counseling for more thorough treatment.

Amplification or Hearing aids can provide relief to some people with hearing loss as the amplification for sounds that the person wants to hear also increases ambient noise enough to "mask" the tinnitus. Sound Therapy devices for those without hearing loss can be worn like a hearing aid and provide a sound that helps to mask the patient's tinnitus. These were specific devices that needed to be worn and fit according to a strict schedule to provide tinnitus treatment. Within the last few years hearing aids now incorporate a masker in all or most of their devices so that a person with tinnitus can have an optional tinnitus program or customize their hearing aid to provide masking and thus hopefully provide some relief.

The algorithm of the hearing aid will often take into account the patient's audiogram and set the masking noise at the most appropriate level. Also in some hearing aid devices the patient themselves can manipulate the masking noise to a level that provides comfort. This new convenience and ease of use to a patient with tinnitus, who may already or needs to be, wearing a hearing aid indicates to me that more people are looking for relief and will be able to find it in a more convenient way and accessible manner.