

When Your Child has Tinnitus

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Tinnitus is a ringing or other noise that is not produced by an external source. The sound can be in one or both ears; can sound like a roar, hiss, buzz, or whine; and can be heard all the time or just some of the time. Tinnitus is a

fairly common condition that affects 10 to 15% of people. According to the [Canadian Academy of Audiology](#), over 360,000 Canadians have tinnitus.

There is not a single cause of tinnitus and sometimes it is present with no cause at all. However, sometimes tinnitus can be triggered by the following: sensorineural hearing loss, ear infections, exposure to loud noise, allergies, certain medications, diabetes, lack of sleep, head or neck injury, middle ear problems, anemia, or blood pressure abnormalities.

Tinnitus is not uncommon in children. Although children tend to have tinnitus as often as adults, children generally do not complain of tinnitus. Researchers believe that a child with tinnitus considers the noise in the ear to be normal, as it has usually been present for a long time.

Continuous tinnitus can be annoying and distracting. In severe cases, it can cause a child to be upset or bothered, and it can interfere with the ability to lead a normal life. The good news is that most children with tinnitus seem to eventually outgrow the symptom. It is unusual to see a child carry the problem into adulthood.



Related to tinnitus is **hyperacusis** and **misophonia**. *Hyperacusis* is the decreased tolerance of everyday sounds. *Misophonia* is extreme sensitivity to specific sounds, like chewing or breathing.

Hyperacusis is the decreased tolerance of everyday sounds.

With hyperacusis, children are often unable to properly describe what they are experiencing using words, and instead they use body or emotional gestures (crying, screaming, hitting, biting) to communicate. They may also simply try to 'get away.' Common signs include crying in noisy environments, clapping hands over the ears, fear of noise or noisy objects, self-harm when exposed to loud noise, e.g., vacuum cleaners, and reluctance to participate in noisy or loud activities, e.g., watch parades, birthday parties, musical presentations, etc.

Misophonia is extreme sensitivity to specific sounds.

If you think your child has tinnitus, hyperacusis or misophonia, first arrange an appointment with an audiologist. The audiologist will be able to test the child's hearing and auditory system as well as provide treatment. If the test results show that the child needs additional testing, the audiologist can then make additional referrals to family doctors or other medical specialists.

What Treatments may be Offered

Most people, including children, who are diagnosed with tinnitus or decreased sound tolerance find that there is no specific problem underlying their condition. However, audiologists suggest that the following steps be taken with the child diagnosed with tinnitus and/or decreased sound tolerance:

- 01.** Reassure the child. Explain that this condition is common and they are not alone. The audiologist can explain why the tinnitus or decreased sound tolerance exists in terms and images that a child can understand.
- 02.** Explain that she may feel less distressed by their tinnitus or decreased sound tolerance in the future. Many children find it helpful to have their tinnitus or decreased sound tolerance explained carefully and to know about ways to manage it. This is partly due to a medical concept known as neuroplasticity, where children are more able to change their response to all kinds of stimulation. If carefully managed, childhood tinnitus and decreased sound tolerance may not be a serious problem.

03. Use sound generators or provide background noise. Sound therapy, which makes tinnitus and bothersome sounds less noticeable, has been used to treat adults for some time, and can also be used with children. Sound therapy may help the child's brain adapt to the tinnitus. The sound can be environmental, such as a fan, or quiet background music.

04. A child with tinnitus or decreased sound tolerance and hearing loss may find that hearing aids can help improve the tinnitus and hyperacusis. Hearing aids can pick up sounds children may not normally hear, which in turn will help their brains filter out their tinnitus and bothersome sounds. It may also help them by taking the strain out of listening. Straining to hear can make your child's brain focus on the tinnitus or bothersome noises.

05. Finally, help your child relax. Sometimes tinnitus or sound tolerance gets worse under stress.

-Adapted from [*American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery*](#)