

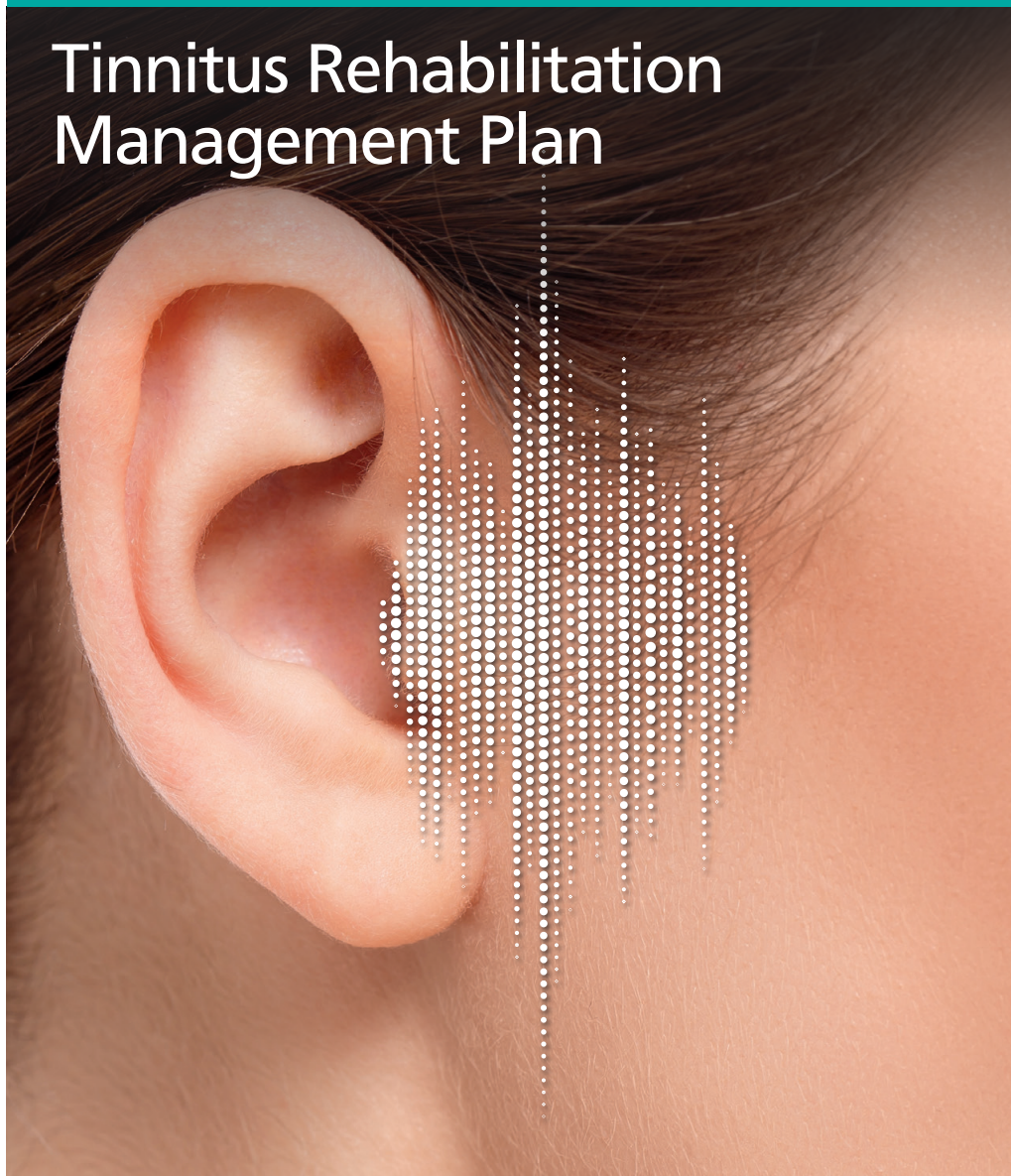
Outstanding Care,
Compassionate People,
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Sherwood Forest Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Audiology Services

Tinnitus Rehabilitation Management Plan



Q: What is tinnitus?

A: Tinnitus is a term for noises heard in the ear, ears, or in the head, where no obvious sound source is apparent. Typically people describe the noises they perceive as ringing, whistling, buzzing, humming or hissing. Tinnitus is not a disease or illness, it is a symptom which can be brought on, most commonly, by a change in hearing, but it can also be triggered by an emotional or physical change not related to hearing.

Some people are able to push their tinnitus into the background and for them it is not a problem. However, for some people, the tinnitus is intrusive and difficult to tolerate. This is particularly so if the person does not know how the tinnitus is produced.



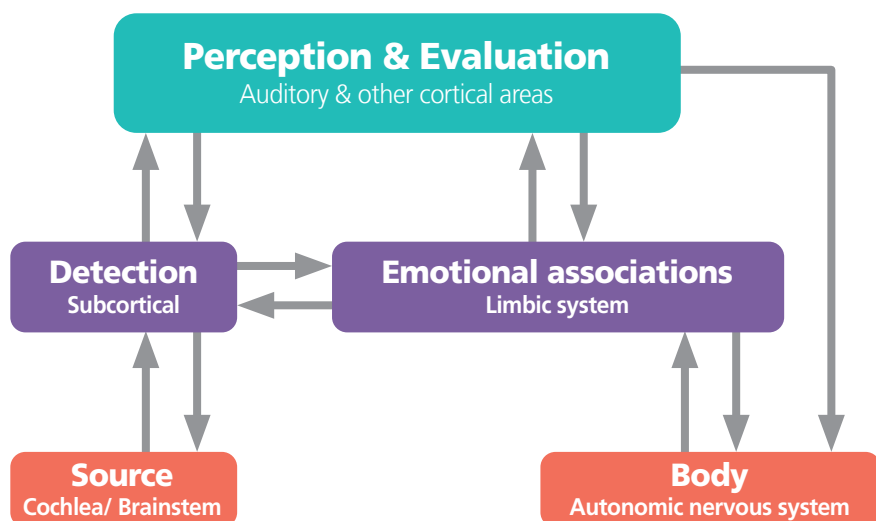
The ears are the peripheral sensors for your hearing system and pick up external sound. The function of the ear is to change this into electrical messages that the brain can interpret. The brain then receives these messages and decides whether they should be filtered out or listened to.

As well as these external sound messages there is also low-level activity taking place in the ears and auditory pathway all the time. Normally this low-level activity is filtered out by the brain. However, if

something triggers the brain to pay attention to this activity then you will become aware of it as 'tinnitus'.

The most typical trigger for becoming aware of the tinnitus is a hearing loss, but high stress levels may also make the brain less likely to filter out the background activity.

You will 'hear' or be aware of the tinnitus until its significance is understood. Once you understand how your tinnitus is produced then it is a step closer to relearning to filter out.



Tinnitus Management

Those patients complaining of tinnitus will initially have a full assessment including medical history, examination and hearing tests. Based on this, medical conditions related to the tinnitus can be confirmed or ruled out and provide a basis for more specific tinnitus management. Studies have indicated that, even without any 'treatment', tinnitus can disappear or at least diminish in the majority of cases, as the brain loses interest in and stops paying attention to the signal. This process is called 'habituation' and can take months or even years. Tinnitus management strategies often just speed up this natural process, especially for those patients who find it difficult to filter out their tinnitus.

In the tinnitus clinic, your audiologist will discuss your experience of tinnitus with you and agree upon an individual tinnitus management plan. The long term goal is habituation to tinnitus and this can be achieved by different strategies, dependent on individual needs. Strategies include education, counselling and the provision of devices such as hearing aids or wearable noise generators, or a combination device which incorporates both.

Sound Therapy

People who have tinnitus often notice that it is more bothersome in a quiet environment (for example at night) and that listening to other sounds can make it less intrusive. Deliberate use of any sound to reduce tinnitus awareness or alleviate the distress associated with it can be classed as sound therapy. It is unclear exactly how sound therapy works. Some people feel it brings about actual changes in sensitivity in the hearing parts of the brain while others think it acts as a psychological distraction or an aid to relaxation. It may be a combination of all of these things. What is clear is that most people with tinnitus use it in some form or other.

Sound therapy is often used as a component of a tinnitus management strategy at a hospital or clinic. Many research studies have found it plays a less important part than counselling in bringing about improvements in people's tinnitus, so it is perhaps best to regard it as one tool among several you might use.

If you have a hearing loss, hearing aids are likely to help you. They provide a form of sound therapy through giving you easier access to everyday environmental sound. Most people find they hear their tinnitus less when their hearing aids are switched on.

For those patients who struggle to sleep at night because of their tinnitus, portable devices are available. These portable machines sit on the bedside/table-top and provide a choice of soothing sounds at the touch of a button. If left on at a low volume all night, sound therapy also provides a soothing distraction from tinnitus when you wake up in the early hours and your surroundings are otherwise quiet.

Some sound generators and most CD players, mp3 players etc can be plugged into a pillow speaker or sound pillow, making the sound less audible to partners.

Tinnitus Management Plan

Tinnitus is a very personal condition that affects each person differently. It is best treated on an individual level. Your individual management plan is outlined below.

YOUR TINNITUS GOALS

- ☐ Become less aware of your tinnitus
 - ☐ Reduce your tinnitus frustration level
 - ☐ Manage your tinnitus triggers
 - ☐ Reduce the impact of tinnitus on your sleep
 - ☐ Incorporate relaxation techniques into your daily lifestyle
 - ☐ Other (please specify) _____
- _____
- _____

YOUR MANAGEMENT PLAN

- ☐ Hearing aids
- ☐ Tinnitus noise generator
- ☐ Combination device with noise generators
- ☐ Tinnitus apps
- ☐ Tinnitus counselling
- ☐ Relaxation exercises

Notes _____

If you have any questions or queries about your tinnitus management plan, please contact the tinnitus team on 01623 672383 or via email: sfh-tr.audiologyhearingaidrepairs@nhs.net

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Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

If you would like this letter or information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

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