

Musical hallucinations

This factsheet tells you about musical hallucinations – a rare form of tinnitus where music is heard when none is being played. It explains what causes musical hallucinations, what you can do if you experience them, and what products and therapies can help.

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i If you’d like this factsheet in Braille, large print or audio, please contact our Information Line – see last page for contact details.




Medical disclaimer

The information in this factsheet is not medical advice and, by providing it, neither Action on Hearing Loss nor our audiology specialists undertake any responsibility for your medical care, or accept you as a patient. Before acting on any of the information contained in this factsheet, or deciding on a course of treatment, you should discuss the matter with your GP (family doctor) or other medical professional who is treating you.

What are musical hallucinations?

A musical hallucination is the experience of hearing parts of tunes or songs when there's no music being played. It is a rare form of tinnitus, which is the medical term to describe sounds that some people hear that don't have an external source.

While tinnitus is common, people usually experience it as a ringing, buzzing or hissing sound. Only a small number of people have musical hallucinations.

 To find out more about the common type of tinnitus, see our factsheet *Tinnitus - causes and therapies*.

What do musical hallucinations sound like?

This will vary from person to person, but they tend to be experienced as short pieces of music or simple melodies.

Research has shown that most people who have musical hallucinations hear well-known tunes, but there are cases of people hearing tunes that aren't part of any known musical piece.

Who has musical hallucinations?

While anyone can have musical hallucinations, they are more common in women than in men, in people around 60 years of age, and in those who live alone.

Several conditions are thought to increase the likelihood of having musical hallucinations, including:

- hearing loss
- hyperacusis (increased sensitivity to sound)
- epilepsy
- Alzheimer's disease.

What causes musical hallucinations?


Musical hallucinations are usually a symptom of a problem within the hearing system, although the exact cause isn't fully understood.

They can sometimes be linked to certain medications, but they usually stop when the medication is stopped. If you think that your medication has triggered musical hallucinations, visit your GP for advice.

Note: Do not stop taking your medication or change the dosage without seeing your GP first.

Musical hallucinations, like the more common type of tinnitus, can also be triggered, and worsened, by stress. That's why minimising stress levels by using relaxation exercises ([see page 4](#)) is an important part of tinnitus management.

Musical hallucinations can be frightening at first. Some people worry that they are a symptom of a psychological illness – but this is very rarely the case. It's thought that musical hallucinations are most often related to hearing loss. If there is another underlying cause for musical hallucinations, it's likely that there'll be other symptoms, too.

 See our factsheet *Tinnitus – causes and therapies* for more on the link between certain medications and tinnitus.

I'm having musical hallucinations – what should I do?

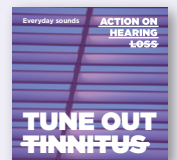
If you start to have musical hallucinations, or are worried about the noises in your ear(s) or head, see your GP and ask to be referred to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist. It may be helpful to take this factsheet with you when you see your GP, to help you explain what you are experiencing.

The ENT specialist will check your ears and may carry out some tests to make sure there are no underlying medical problems. You will also have a series of hearing tests.

The specialist will give you more information about musical hallucinations. They may refer you to a tinnitus clinic for specialist tinnitus advice and therapies.

Products to help with tinnitus

We sell many products, and a range of CDs, that create soothing sounds to help you relax, sleep and manage your tinnitus. Contact our Customer Services team to find out more or to request our free *Products* catalogue:



Telephone: **03330 144 525**
 Textphone: **03330 144 530**
 Email: solutions@hearingloss.org.uk
 Or shop online: actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop

Is there a cure for musical hallucinations?

There's not yet a cure for musical hallucinations, but if you experience them, there are different therapies and products that can help to reduce your awareness of them.

The good news is that, in most cases, tinnitus improves slowly over time by a process known as 'habituation'. This is where the brain learns to adapt to tinnitus, so you are no longer overly aware of it.

Our tinnitus research is focused on better understanding the causes of tinnitus, and using this knowledge to develop a range of tinnitus cures ([see page 5](#)).

What therapies can help me manage musical hallucinations?

There's a range of therapies that can help. Your audiologist or tinnitus specialist will discuss with you which of the following therapies may be helpful for you.

- **Sound therapy** – soothing background noise can distract you from your tinnitus and help you to relax. There are different products available ([see page 5](#)). You may also find sounds around the house helpful, such as the whirring of a fan. If used regularly, sound therapy can help you to habituate your tinnitus, so you 'train' your brain to 'ignore' it.
- **Relaxation exercises** – you may notice your tinnitus more when you are worried or tired, and this can make you more anxious or stressed. You can learn to control your responses to stressful situations by using relaxation exercises, which you can learn from books, CDs, DVDs, apps (software applications for smartphones and tablet devices) or relaxation classes.
- **Mindfulness** – this is a simple form of meditation that involves paying more attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and the world around you. It may help you notice signs of stress or anxiety earlier, and help you deal with them better.
- **Counselling** – there are different types of counselling, all of which can help if you have tinnitus and want to talk about it. Talking to someone who will listen and show understanding can help to relieve your fears and reduce stress. Speak to your GP or audiologist about getting a referral.
- **Distraction techniques** – if tinnitus bothers you during the day, try to take your mind off it by distracting yourself – for example, by reading, watching TV or listening to music. If tinnitus troubles you when you're trying to sleep, there are sound therapy products that can help to distract you ([see page 5](#)).
- **Hearing aids** – if you also have hearing loss, these may help. They will let you hear a greater variety of sounds – those you want to focus on and general environmental noises – that can help to distract you from tinnitus.



See our factsheets *Tinnitus – causes and therapies* and *Stress and tinnitus*.

What products can help me?

There are lots of different products that can help you to habituate musical hallucinations, which means reaching a stage when you're not overly aware of them.

The products available include:

- **Behind-the-ear sound generators** – these look a bit like hearing aids and produce a soft 'rushing' noise.
- **In-the-ear sound generators** – these small devices are designed to sit inside your ear canal and produce a soft 'rushing' noise. They don't have as many settings as modern behind-the-ear sound generators and are being used less frequently.
- **Bedside and desktop sound generators** – often known as 'tinnitus relaxers', these play a range of environmental and soothing sounds.
- **Sound pillows** (normal pillows that have speakers inside) and **pillow speakers**, which you can connect to your tinnitus relaxer, stereo or personal music player. They let you listen to sounds in bed without disturbing anyone else, and without the discomfort of earphones.
- **CDs, or albums that you can download**, which play relaxing sounds such as birdsong or rainfall.
- **Combination devices** – these are designed for people with both tinnitus and hearing loss, and contain a hearing aid and a sound generator.

- **Tinnitus apps** – there are now many apps available for smartphones and tablet devices that are designed to help with tinnitus. They have a wide range of sounds to choose from, and some allow you to customise sounds.

Your audiology department may be able to provide sound-therapy products if they're suitable. However, what you may be offered will depend on what's available from your NHS service and what's most appropriate for your needs.


You can also buy tinnitus products from private tinnitus services and online stores such as the Action on Hearing Loss shop: actiononhearingloss.org.uk/shop

What tinnitus research is Action on Hearing Loss funding?

There are currently no medicines on the market specifically approved to treat tinnitus – we're looking to change this. We're funding a range of projects that focus on improving our understanding of how tinnitus starts and progresses, so that this knowledge can be used to develop effective treatments.

We've also awarded a grant to researchers at Newcastle University, who aim to develop a new technique to measure tinnitus more accurately by monitoring brainwave activity. This new technique will help tinnitus researchers take potential new treatments that have been tested in the laboratory to the next stage – testing them on people, a critical step in developing new medicines.

This research should make the future development of effective medicines to treat tinnitus easier and, hopefully, encourage more investment in this area.

 Find out more about the research we're funding at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/biomedicalresearch

Where can I get further information about tinnitus?

Action on Hearing Loss

Our other **Tinnitus** factsheets are:

- *Tinnitus - causes and therapies*
- *Stress and tinnitus*
- *How to help friends and family with tinnitus*
- *Pulsatile tinnitus.*

You can order these from our Information Line ([see last page](#) for contact details) or download them from our website at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusfacts

You can also find lots of helpful information about tinnitus on our website: actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitus

Tinnitus Helpline

For tinnitus information and support, contact our Tinnitus Helpline:

Telephone: **0808 808 6666**
Textphone: **0808 808 9000**

SMS: **0780 000 0360**

Email: tinnitushelpline@hearingloss.org.uk

Tinnitus forum

Get in touch with a supportive group of people with tinnitus through our online Tinnitus forum. Share what works for you, and pick up some other great tips: actionhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusforum

Social networking

You can also get in touch with us, and others, through Facebook and Twitter:

Facebook: [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/actiononhearingloss)

actiononhearingloss

Twitter: twitter.com/actiononhearing

Other organisations

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

BACP can give you a list of therapists in your area.

BACP House
15 St John's Business Park
Lutterworth
Leicestershire
LE17 4HB

Telephone: **01455 883 300**

Textphone: **01455 560 606**

Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Website: bacp.co.uk

British Tinnitus Association (BTA)

The BTA campaigns for better services for people with tinnitus. It supports a network of local tinnitus support groups across the UK, has a range of publications and produces a members' magazine, *Quiet*.

Ground Floor
Unit 5
Acorn Business Park
Woodseats Close
Sheffield
S8 0TB

Telephone: **0800 018 0527**

Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk

Website: tinnitus.org.uk

Information you can trust

The Information Standard certifies us as producers of high-quality, evidence-based information.

Thank you to **Magdalena Sereda, Senior Research Fellow in Tinnitus, NIHR Nottingham Biomedical Research Centre, British Tinnitus Association Head of Research**, for helping us review and update this factsheet, published August 2017.

For a list of references for this factsheet, please email us at references@hearingloss.org.uk

Did you find this factsheet helpful?

We'd love to know what you think of this factsheet - please email us at reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk

If you'd like to join our Readers' Panel, to help us create new publications and improve existing ones, please let us know.

Further information from Action on Hearing Loss

Our expert information covers everything you need to know about:

- hearing loss and deafness
- tinnitus
- ear problems and treatments
- hearing aids and cochlear implants
- useful products and technology
- communication tactics and support
- benefits and grants
- your rights.

Visit our website actiononhearingloss.org.uk or call our Information Line ([see last page](#)) for information, support and publications. You can also find out about services in your area, our hearing research, and how you can get involved.

Please help us support others

We provide our leaflets, factsheets and Information Line service free of charge to anyone affected by deafness, tinnitus or hearing loss in the UK. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to help us do this. We would be very grateful if you would consider making a donation - of as little or as much as you can afford.

Please send a cheque, payable to Action on Hearing Loss, to:

Freepost RTLX-CZKX-BTTZ
Action on Hearing Loss
1-3 Highbury Station Road
London N1 1SE
(No stamp needed)

Donate online at actiononhearingloss.org.uk/icanhelp
Or make a donation over the phone by credit or debit card:

 **0203 227 6182**

 **0203 227 6185**

Thank you.

Our purpose is to help people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. We enable them to take control of their lives and remove the barriers in their way.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us, go to actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss Information Line

Telephone **0808 808 0123**
Textphone **0808 808 9000**
SMS **0780 000 0360**
(standard text message rates apply)
Email **information@hearingloss.org.uk**

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