







What causes tinnitus?

A number of health conditions can cause or worsen an existing tinnitus. In many cases, an exact cause is never found.

Common causes include:

-  **Hearing loss.** For many people, hearing loss can cause tinnitus.
 -  **Exposure to loud noise.** Loud noises, such as those from heavy equipment, chain saws and firearms, are common causes of noise related hearing loss. Both short term and long term exposure to loud sound can cause permanent hearing damage.
 -  **Earwax blockage.** Earwax protects your ear canal and eardrum by trapping dirt and slowing down the growth of bacteria. When too much accumulates, it becomes too hard to wash away naturally, causing hearing loss or irritation of the eardrum. If you suspect that you have a wax blockage, do not attempt to clear this yourself, see your GP.
 -  **Ear bone changes.** Stiffening of the bones in your middle ear (otosclerosis) may affect your hearing and cause tinnitus. This condition, caused by abnormal bone growth, tends to run in families.
 -  **Menieres disease.** Tinnitus can be an early indicator of Meniere's disease, an inner ear disorder that may be caused by abnormal inner ear fluid pressure.
 -  **TMJ disorders.** Problems with the tempromandibular joint, the joint on each side of your head in front of your ears, where your lower jawbone meets your skull, can cause tinnitus. Teeth grinding can make TMJ worse.
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Head injuries or neck injuries. Head or neck trauma can affect the inner ear, hearing nerves or brain function linked to hearing. Such injuries generally cause tinnitus only in one ear.



Eustachian tube dysfunction. In this condition, the tube in your ear connecting the middle ear to your upper throat remains expanded all the time, which can make your ear feel full. Loss of a significant amount of weight, pregnancy and radiation therapy can sometimes cause this type of dysfunction.



Acoustic neuroma. This non cancerous (benign) tumour develops on the cranial nerve that runs from your brain to your inner ear and controls balance and hearing. Also called vestibular schwannoma, this condition generally causes tinnitus in one ear only.



Muscle spasms in the inner ear. Muscles in the inner ear can tense up (spasm), which can result in tinnitus, hearing loss and a feeling of fullness in the ear. This sometimes happens for no explainable reason, but can also be caused by neurologic diseases, including multiple sclerosis.

Medications that can cause tinnitus:

A number of medications may cause or worsen an existing tinnitus. Generally, the higher the dose of these medications, the worse the tinnitus becomes. Often, the unwanted noise disappears when you stop taking these drugs.

If you suspect that this may be the cause for you, do not stop taking the medication as it has been prescribed for a reason, but speak with your GP. Medications known to worsen tinnitus include;

- **Antibiotics.** Including polymyxin B, erythromycin, vancomycin and neomycin
- **Cancer medications.** Including methotrexate and cisplatin
- **Water pills (diuretics).** Such as bumetanide, ethacrynic acid or furosemide
- **Quinine medications** used for malaria or other health conditions
- **Aspirin** taken in uncommonly high doses (usually 12 or more a day)

