



Helping children *with Tinnitus*

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is when you hear a sound in your head or ears even though there is no sound coming from outside. In most cases, the brain creates the sound.

Is tinnitus common in children?

Around 12% to 36% of children experience tinnitus. It is more common in children with hearing loss than in children with normal hearing.

What does it sound like?

Everyone's tinnitus is different. Some people hear buzzing or ringing. Others hear whooshing, crackling, or humming. The sound can be low, medium, or high pitched. It might be one sound or several. It can be there all the time or come and go. It may be quiet or loud, and the volume can change.

What can I do to help?

- Even though you cannot hear your child's tinnitus, the sounds are real to them. Let them talk about it if they want to. Try not to brush it off as "nothing", as this can make them more worried. Remind your child what you discussed in clinic and reassure them when needed.
- Try to stay calm about tinnitus. If you seem worried, your child may worry too, and that can make the tinnitus feel more noticeable.
- Encourage your child to keep doing the things they enjoy. If they change their life a lot because of tinnitus, it can start to feel like a bigger problem. Some small changes may help, like having quiet background music or a fan on when reading or studying if tinnitus is worse in silence.
- Tinnitus often feels worse when a child is worried or stressed. Reassure them that it should improve when the stressful situation has passed. Encourage them to talk to you, or a teacher, about worries. Simple relaxation techniques can also help with anxiety and, in turn, tinnitus.
- Bedtime can be difficult for some deaf children. When they take off their speech processors, tinnitus may be more noticeable. Sleep is easier when the body and mind are relaxed. Try to avoid TV, computer games, or chatting online in the hour before bed, as this can overstimulate the brain. Try to avoid hard exercise in the evening too. Instead, choose a calm activity such as reading, story time, or a jigsaw, or use this time to talk about the day together.
- Try to talk about any worries before bedtime. Some children find a "worry monster" helpful if they find it hard to talk about worries.
- A warm bath and a milky drink may help your child wind down before sleep.
- It can help to think about the sounds in a different way, so they feel less scary. You could give the sound a funny name or make up a story about it. Having something else to focus on can also help, like a night light, lava lamp, or something small to hold.
- The National Deaf Children's Society has some good suggestions for helping to reduce anxiety at bedtime.

What causes tinnitus?

We don't know the exact cause of tinnitus. What we do know is that tinnitus is **not** a disease or an illness. It is thought to happen because of a change in the way the brain or body works, and it is not always linked to a problem in the ear.

When we hear a sound, it travels from the ear to the brain along the hearing (auditory) nerve. Our ears send lots of information to the brain, and the brain normally filters out sounds it decides are not important, like traffic noise or a ticking clock.

If something changes — for example, hearing loss or an ear infection — the amount of information the brain gets from the ear can change too. The brain may then 'turn down' its filtering to try to pick up more detail. That extra background activity can be heard as tinnitus.

Tinnitus can also start or get worse because of other changes, such as being unwell or feeling stressed. For children, this might include changing school, exams, friendship problems, or difficulties at home.

Many children (and adults) find that hearing aids or cochlear implants help to reduce tinnitus. However, for some people, tinnitus can feel worse at first when they start using them.

How will tinnitus affect my child?

Most children with tinnitus are not bothered by it, and a simple explanation and reassurance are all that is needed.

- Tinnitus can make listening and concentrating harder. This can make a child feel tired and may affect learning at school. The University of Southampton Auditory Implant Service (USAIS) can speak with the school if needed.
- Many children (and parents) say tinnitus affects sleep. If this is happening, start by asking what sounds your child hears and what worries they have about it, then address those concerns.

Will it go away?

In most cases, tinnitus settles down and becomes less noticeable over time. This is called habituation. It's like walking into a room with a noisy fan or a ticking clock: at first it seems loud, but after a while you stop noticing it because your brain decides it is not important. The same thing can happen with tinnitus.

**Tinnitus is a
very common
condition.**

**Remember that tinnitus is a very
common condition and most children
are not unduly worried about it.**

You may also find these helpful:

Tinnitus UK: tinnitus.org.uk

Relax Kids: relaxkids.com

National Deaf Children's Society:
www.ndcs.org.uk

Contact USAIS

Email: ais@southampton.ac.uk

Phone: +44(0)23 8059 3522

SMS: +44(0)7887790765

Visit [ais.southampton.ac.uk/
tinnitus-resources](https://ais.southampton.ac.uk/tinnitus-resources)

If you still have questions or worries,
you can speak to one of the USAIS
clinicians or contact your local
audiology clinic.



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AUDITORY IMPLANT SERVICE

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