

Did you know?

The latest from the field of otolaryngology

Tinnitus Questions and Answers

Should I tell my patients that the prognosis for tinnitus is poor, and it is something they will just have to learn to live with? No. Definitely no.

Can the annoyance of tinnitus become a severe problem? Tinnitus affects 17% of the general U.S. population, or about 44 million people, including 35% of the elderly. About 10-12 million people experience tinnitus problems serious enough to require professional help. About one-quarter of these suffer so severely that their quality of life and their productivity are impaired.

Have new pharmacologic treatments been devised which specifically target the neurotransmitters involved in problematic tinnitus? Yes. Current intensive research has identified the GABA-A receptor as participating in at least one common type of tinnitus. Targeting this receptor with customized regimens of gabapentin and clonazepam may dramatically reduce the subjective loudness of the tinnitus.

Are there psychological components to tinnitus which might seriously interfere with a patient's day-to-day functioning? The reaction of the limbic system to the sometimes overpowering noise of tinnitus may produce depression and anxiety which may be rather incapacitating for the patient's routine daily functioning. Antidepressants and anxiolytics are important. Moreover, psychoeducation and psychotherapy – tailored specifically for the tinnitus situation – may dramatically reduce the patient's emotional suffering.

Do "talk therapies" also promote habituation to the disturbing noise? A new kind of talk therapy, called "tinnitus retraining therapy" has now been clearly documented to promote patient habituation. In other words, the tinnitus "goes quiet" because the patient can now successfully ignore it.

Are there any technological advances to help patients with refractory tinnitus? Yes. Custom sound generators, which look much like MP3 players, are programmed to engage the limbic system and stimulate unused auditory neural pathways. They are custom fitted to an individual patient and not only promote habituation but also decrease the eventual loudness of the tinnitus.

What is the role of a hearing aid in tinnitus rehabilitation? For patients who have tinnitus associated with hearing loss, particularly the elderly, the fitting of a custom digital hearing aid may boost perceived sound to cover up and drown out the troublesome subjective noise of the tinnitus.



Dr. Norman Berlinger specializes in the treatment of tinnitus, including therapies which target hearing, affect, habituation, and neurotransmitters.

Call us at (612) 339-2836 or toll-free at (866) 316-0769 to schedule an appointment with a specialist at one of our convenient locations.

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