
Tinnitus and Hyperacusis service

The Tinnitus Clinic at Addenbrooke's was set up in 1985 to offer modern therapeutic approaches for patients with troublesome tinnitus.

The clinic can offer a range of treatments including sound therapy, relaxation therapy, counselling and hearing aids. The actual therapy prescribed depends on the needs of the individual and the cause of the tinnitus.

The Tinnitus Clinic has an active involvement in research, collaborating with other audiology departments, universities, psychologist, auditory neuroscientists and pharmacologist. Some patients at Addenbrooke's who are suitable for participating in this research will be invited to enrol in clinical studies, which will have been granted approval from local ethics committees.

What is Tinnitus, What causes it and What treatment is available?

Tinnitus is the medical term for the perception of sound that does not have an external source. Tinnitus is colloquially known as 'ringing in the ears' but can be different sounds or even a mixture of sounds ranging from buzzing and humming to whistling or even music. Sometimes the tinnitus beats in time with the person's pulse – known as pulsatile tinnitus. Tinnitus is a common condition with 1 in 3 people reporting some tinnitus experiences, though a much smaller number (2 in 100) find their tinnitus distressing and able to affect their quality of life.

Hyperacusis is a reduction in the ability to tolerate sound. A person with severe hyperacusis has difficulty tolerating everyday sounds, some of which may seem unpleasantly loud to that person but not to others.

There are many causes of tinnitus and hyperacusis: some are related to disorders of the ear while other can be related to any type of negative life event. Tinnitus can be a troubling and distressing symptom for some people, whilst others can learn to live with it and are not overly troubled by it.

There is a range of treatment available including sound therapy, relaxation therapy, counselling and hearing aids.

The actual therapy prescribed depends on the needs of the individual and the cause of the

tinnitus. Understanding you tinnitus is an important first step towards effectively managing it. For some people simply understanding the cause and nature of their tinnitus can alleviate any worries and thus improve their perception of tinnitus. There are several books available which discuss the mechanism of tinnitus. You can download a sample chapter from "Living with Tinnitus and Hyperacusis" (with kind permission of Fiona Marshall, Sheldon Press) – Click the cover image to the right.

Sound enrichment is a commonly used technique in the treatment of tinnitus. The use of low level background sound (such as a fan or quiet ambient music) can reduce the starkness of tinnitus and hence provide relief. For some people this can be helpful during the day. For others, the period in bed before falling asleep can be problematic. In such situations the use of quiet bedside environmental sound, such as the rain or the ocean, can also reduce the starkness of tinnitus and help sleep to come.

If your hearing test shows you have a hearing loss we can arrange for a hearing aid to be fitted, if you feel this is appropriate. The amplified sound through your hearing aid provides a pleasant low level background sound to which many patients report significantly improves their tinnitus.

Many people find that relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) help to make their tinnitus less intrusive. Materials to enable patients to undertake relaxation techniques will be made available if appropriate.

What to expect at your appointment

Before your initial appointment you may have a hearing test performed.

Your initial assessment will be with a senior member of the team and will last up to an hour. During this initial appointment we will talk to you about your tinnitus, your hearing and the impact upon your quality of life of your symptoms. By getting a clear understanding of your tinnitus and how it affects you, an appropriate treatment plan can be formulated.

How to get an appointment/ referral criteria

We currently accept referrals from Addenbrooke's Department of Otolaryngology and other ENT specialists in England. Your consultant will refer you to the Tinnitus and Hyperacusis clinic if appropriate.

If you have problematic Tinnitus or Hyperacusis please speak to your GP.