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TAKING ON TINNITUS - SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

Tinnitus is often described as a ringing, buzzing or hissing sound that a person can hear in their ears or head. The cause of tinnitus is not always known, but we do know it is a symptom of a change in a person's auditory system (ears and brain), not a specific disease or illness.

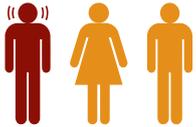
Tinnitus is very common. For some it isn't very noticeable; for others it can become so troubling that it affects daily life, work, sleep, and social life. This brochure gives you facts about tinnitus, and strategies on how to manage it.

Talk to your GP about your tinnitus

If your tinnitus bothers you, your GP can help you develop a plan to manage it. They may refer you to an audiologist to assess or review your tinnitus and hearing, or to an ear, nose and throat specialist to rule out any underlying causes. Your GP might also suggest a psychologist if your tinnitus is causing you distress.

DVA pays for all Gold Card holders and some White Card holders to receive services from a range of healthcare providers as clinically required.

✓ Did you know?



If you have tinnitus, you are not alone. **It is estimated that about one in three Australians will experience tinnitus at some stage of their life**; one in six will have ongoing tinnitus.

➤ Most people who have tinnitus have a degree of hearing loss which can make the tinnitus more noticeable, and communicating more difficult and frustrating. If you have hearing loss along with your tinnitus, you might not be aware of it.

➤ There are no medicines recommended to treat tinnitus. However, there are some very effective strategies that can help make it less of a problem for you. Treatments focus on adapting to tinnitus.

➤ Tinnitus can work a bit like an 'emotional barometer' – it is often more unpleasant when you feel stressed, tired, or alone, have pain or are not feeling well. Learning to relax and manage stress is one of the best ways to lessen the noise of your tinnitus, and make daily life more enjoyable.

✓ Try a range of different strategies

No single treatment works for everyone, so talk to your GP about trying a range of strategies to find what works best to reduce the effects of your tinnitus.

Some or all of these strategies might be helpful, but all are worth trying:



Auditory therapies and devices

Many people use pleasant sounds such as playing the radio softly or listening to relaxation music to help mask their tinnitus. Different devices can help, including hearing devices with tinnitus settings that are fitted to the ear and play a soft continuous sound. There are also table-top sound generators that can be useful to help you sleep at night.

An audiologist can assess your hearing and suggest suitable devices and treatment options for your tinnitus.



Education

Learning as much as you can about tinnitus can help you to feel better about it and help you to understand your options for managing it. For example, it can be useful to learn about how your brain processes noise, what might make your tinnitus worse or better, and strategies for focusing your attention away from the tinnitus. For further information visit Tinnitus Australia www.tinnitusaustralia.org.au/supporting-you/ or healthdirect www.healthdirect.gov.au/tinnitus



Self-care

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle by eating and sleeping well, doing the things you enjoy and keeping physically and mentally active, can help you to pay less attention to your tinnitus so it becomes less troubling.



Psychological therapies

A psychologist can be very helpful for those who have troublesome tinnitus. Psychological therapies including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (a proven treatment for tinnitus) can help you:

- change the way you think and react to your tinnitus

- learn ways to focus your attention away from your tinnitus
- learn mindfulness and relaxation techniques
- help you to better manage stress.

Figure 1 shows an example of how a psychologist can help to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of a person who has troublesome tinnitus. Your GP can refer you to a psychologist.

There are also a range of tools designed to help support serving and ex-serving ADF members and their families such as relaxation techniques and tools for emotional wellbeing (in the form of 1 to 20 minute videos) available at www.openarms.gov.au/get-support/self-help-tools

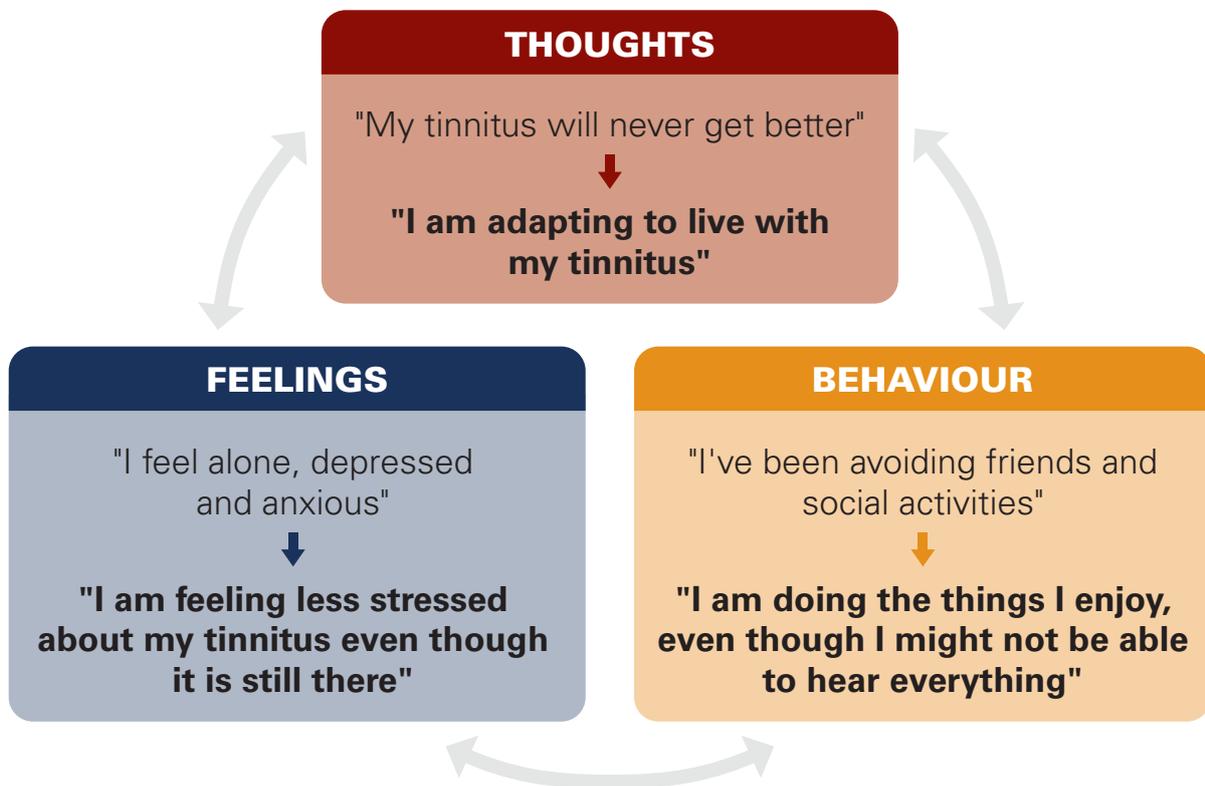


Figure 1: An example of how a psychologist can help change the way you think, feel and react to your tinnitus

DVA supports for tinnitus

Your GP might refer you to an audiologist or specialist who can suggest treatment such as counselling for tinnitus, specialised hearing devices with tinnitus settings, auditory devices to help mask tinnitus, and sleeping aids.

In most cases, hearing devices can be provided through The Hearing Services Program (HSP) funded by the Australian Government. DVA can fund tinnitus treatment for Gold and White Card holders who have tinnitus as an accepted condition. For more information visit www.dva.gov.au/health-and-treatment/injury-or-health-treatments/health-services/hearing-services or see *The Veterans' guide to better hearing* at: www.dva.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/p04129-guide-to-better-hearing.pdf

If you have any concerns about your medicines and tinnitus, ask your GP about having a DVA-funded Medicines Review where a pharmacist can go through all of your medicines with you.

✓ Ask for help if you are feeling distressed

Keep doing the things you enjoy and do not let tinnitus stop you. If your tinnitus is causing ongoing distress and stopping you from enjoying your life, seek help and support:

- talk to a friend, family member or with your GP
- contact Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling available 24/7 on 1800 011 046 or at: www.openarms.gov.au
- make an appointment to talk with a psychologist or counsellor. Your GP can refer you.

If you are finding it difficult to cope, support is available. *DVA funds treatment for any mental health condition if you have served at least one day in the ADF.*

What else should I be aware of...

- Beware remedies that suggest miracle cures. Talk to your GP before starting or changing any treatment.
- Avoid exposure to loud noise as it can worsen hearing loss and tinnitus. Wear ear protection for loud activities such as mowing the lawn, using machinery, or listening to live music.
- If you use headphones or earbuds for listening to music, make them noise cancelling to block out background noise, so you can keep the volume low. Follow the 80-90 rule. Listen at no more than 80% volume for no more than 90 minutes per day.