Hill Country

Ear, Nose, and Throat, P.A.

42 Gruene Park Drive Phone: 830-629-5830

New Braunfels, TX, 78130 Fax: 830-629-3647

Common Questions about Tinnitus

Sometimes I hear ringing in my ears. Is that unusual?

Ringing in the ears is not uncommon or unusual. The ringing or roaring is called tinnitus. Nearly 36 million Americans suffer from tinnitus. It may come and go or it may be continuous. It can vary in pitch from a low roar to a high-pitched squeal. Or you may hear it in one ear or both. When ringing is constant, it can be annoying and distracting.

Can other people hear the noise in my ears?

Others usually cannot hear the noise. In very rare situations when the noise is caused by abnormalities in blood vessels around the ear or by muscle spasms, it may sound like clicks or crackling coming from inside the middle ear.

What causes tinnitus?

There are many possible causes for subjective tinnitus which is noise only the patient can hear. Possible causes include ear wax, middle ear infections, a hole in the ear drum, stiffening of the middle ear bones (otosclerosis), allergies, high blood pressure, a tumor, diabetes, thyroid problems, injury to head or neck, a virus, fever, and hearing nerve damage in the inner ear due to noise, aging, drugs, or disease. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the harmful effects of loud industrial noise, firearm noise, and loud music and do not take precautions until the damage is irreversible.

What is the treatment of tinnitus?

Tinnitus is very difficult to treat and is rarely cured. If an otolaryngologist finds a specific cause for the tinnitus, certain treatments may provide some improvement. The examination may require an extensive workup including hearing and balance tests, x-rays,

and laboratory studies. Despite this, in the majority of cases, most causes of tinnitus cannot be identified.

If no cause is identified, can something be done to lessen the tinnitus?

- Avoid noise exposure to loud sounds
- Exercise daily
- Avoid caffeine and decrease salt intake
- Rest. Avoid becoming overly fatigued
- Reduce nervous anxiety. Tinnitus is not life threatening and will not cause deafness. If it cannot be eliminated, try to ignore it.
- Avoid complete silence. Have some type of noise in the room such as a fan, radio on low volume, or even a fish aquarium motor.
- Speak to your audiologist about a tinnitus masker if you have normal earing, or a hearing aid if you have hearing loss. You audiologist can give you the advantages and disadvantages of both devices and help you select the one device best suited to your needs.

Prior to any treatment of tinnitus or noise, it is important that you have a thorough examination, including an evaluation by your otolaryngologist. Your doctor will explain all test results and try to identify or rule out causes for your tinnitus. Your doctor will either treat the cause of the tinnitus or make suggestions to alleviate it such as medications, or hearing aids or dietary changes.