FOOD, DRINK AND TINNITUS

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This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about whether the food or drink you consume may have an effect on your tinnitus.

Foods

A number of people with tinnitus associate fluctuations of their tinnitus with taking certain foods. However, an equivalent number of people find that these same substances will actually improve their tinnitus! Information on the internet suggests that many foods can trigger or exacerbate tinnitus. There is some weak evidence that dietary factors can have an influence on Ménière’s disease but this is generally with regard to the dizziness of Ménière’s rather than the tinnitus and is beyond the scope of this fact sheet. For all other types of tinnitus there is no robust research to link foods to tinnitus. Certainly there does not seem to be any foodstuff that definitely causes or exacerbates tinnitus in every person. Whatever reaction someone with tinnitus might notice is likely to be a personal idiosyncratic reaction.

Unfortunately, there is no simple test for such reactions. As with other types of food intolerance the only way to investigate this is to perform a trial elimination diet. If a food is thought to exacerbate tinnitus it should be cut out of the diet for 2 to 6 weeks.

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.
and then reintroduced to see if the symptom is affected. There are some problems associated with this approach. Firstly, the act of going on an elimination diet can encourage people to monitor their tinnitus, particularly during the reintroduction phase, which can make the tinnitus seem louder. Secondly, it is important to maintain a healthy balanced diet and excluding food groups can be dangerous. We strongly recommend that anyone contemplating an elimination diet should discuss it with their GP and/or a dietician before proceeding. Finally, cutting foods out of the diet means withdrawing something that might have been pleasurable previously. Removing items of food that were previously enjoyed can add to the overall burden of tinnitus.

Drinks

Caffeine

People with tinnitus are frequently told to avoid caffeine containing drinks such as coffee and tea. There is no scientific rationale for this advice. A properly conducted scientific study showed that caffeine was not associated with tinnitus causation. Moreover, the researchers found that withdrawing someone from their usual intake of caffeine did produce side effects, particularly headaches and nausea, and this could potentially worsen pre-existing tinnitus. The sensible advice regarding tea or coffee drinking therefore seems to be to stay on a fairly constant intake and not vary this too much from day to day.

Alcohol

It is often recommended that people with tinnitus should abstain from alcohol, with red wine frequently coming in for special criticism. Once again, there seems little hard evidence to justify these statements.

The majority of the evidence that is available suggests that alcohol is more frequently helpful rather than harmful with respect to tinnitus. There have, however, been some pieces of research that have identified particular groups of people such as teenagers for whom alcohol does seem to be associated with increased levels of tinnitus.

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As with foods, a trial withdrawal and reintroduction would seem to be the sensible way for an individual to establish whether alcohol is related to the level of tinnitus.

A word of caution needs to be sounded here: some people find that alcohol actually helps their tinnitus. We should all keep our alcohol consumption within safe limits and people with tinnitus are no exception to this rule. The government advises that people should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol per week. This is equivalent to:

- **6** 175ml glasses of 13% wine per week or
- **6** pints of 4% beer or lager per week or
- **5** pints of 4.5% cider per week or
- **14** 25ml measures of 40% spirits per week

The guidelines are the same for men and women.

**Tobacco**

It has been known for some time that tobacco smoking can contribute to inner ear hearing loss. The position with regard to tinnitus was less clear though recent research suggests that smokers have a small increased risk of developing tinnitus.

**References**


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**Alternative formats**

This publication is available in standard print on request.

**For further information**

Our helpline staff can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics on 0800 018 0527 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm). You may also find our website www.tinnitus.org.uk helpful. We also offer a free tinnitus management e-learning programme at www.takeontinnitus.co.uk.

**BTA publications**

Our information leaflets are written by leading tinnitus professionals and provide accurate, reliable and authoritative information which is updated regularly. Please contact us if you would like to receive a copy of any of our information leaflets listed below, or they can be downloaded from our website.

*available in Easy Read

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Musical hallucination (musical tinnitus)
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Sources of mutual support for tinnitus
Supporting someone with tinnitus
Taming tinnitus
Tinnitus: a parent’s guide
Tinnitus: a teacher’s guide
Tinnitus and disorders of the temporo-mandibular joint (TMJ) and neck
Tinnitus and sleep disturbance
Tinnitus and stress
Tinnitus services*

Leaflets for children:
Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus (for under 8s)
Tinnitus (for 8-11 year olds)
Tinnitus (for 11-16 year olds)
Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus activity book (for under 8s)
Tinnitus activity book (for 8-11 year olds)
Tinnitus activity book (for 11-16 year olds)

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