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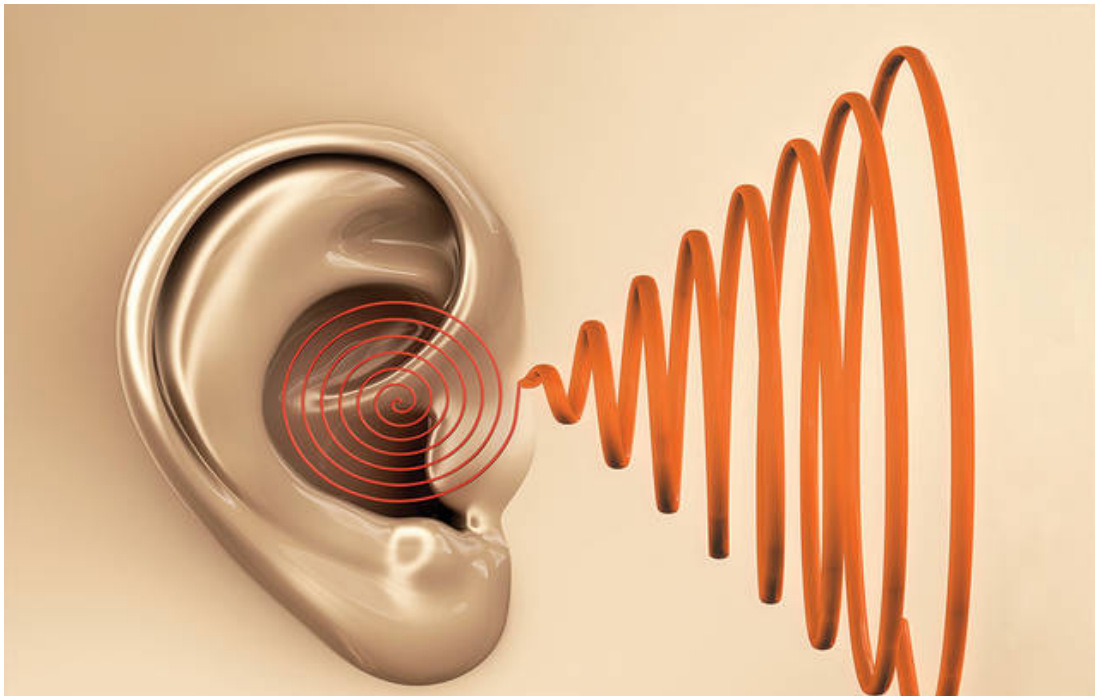
## Features

# Treatment options available for tinnitus

By Jim Miller, Tribune News Services

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COURTESY PHOTO

Tinnitus is a common condition that affects around 45 million Americans, but is usually more prevalent in the 60-and-older age group.

**DEAR SAVVY SENIOR:** Are there any new treatments you know of that can help with constant ear ringing syndrome known as tinnitus? I've had it for years but it's gotten worse the older I get.

— *Ringings Louder at 62*

**DEAR RINGING:** Tinnitus is a common condition that affects around 45 million Americans, but is usually more prevalent in the 60-and-older age group. Here's what you should know along with some tips and treatments that may help.

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## WHAT IS TINNITUS?

Tinnitus (pronounced tin-NIGHT-us or TIN-a-tus) is the sensation of hearing a ringing, buzzing, roaring, hissing or whistling sound in one or both ears when no external sound is present. Tinnitus itself is not a disease, but rather a symptom of some other underlying health condition. The best way to find out what's causing your tinnitus is to see an audiologist, or an otolaryngologist – a doctor who specializes in ear, nose and throat diseases (commonly called an ENT). Causes include:

- >> Age-related and noise-induced hearing loss
- >> Middle ear obstructions, which are usually caused by a buildup of earwax deep in the ear canal.
- >> A side effect of many different medicines like aspirin, ibuprofen, certain blood pressure medicines and diuretics, some antidepressants, cancer medicines and antibiotics.
- >> Various medical conditions such as high blood pressure, vascular disease, diabetes, allergies, thyroid problems, ear or sinus infections, Meniere's disease, Lyme disease, fibromyalgia, otosclerosis, temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder, a tumor, an injury to the head or neck, traumatic brain injury, depression, stress and more.

## TREATING THE CAUSES

While there's currently no cure for tinnitus there are some ways to treat it depending on the cause. For example, if your tinnitus is caused by a wax buildup in your ears or a medical condition (high blood pressure, thyroid problem, etc.), treating the problem may reduce or eliminate the noise. Or, if you think a medication you're taking may be

causing the problem, switching to a different drug, or lowering the dosage may provide some relief.

Another treatment option for tinnitus that can help suppress or mask the sound so it's less bothersome are "sound therapies." These can be as simple as a fan or a white noise machine, or something more sophisticated like a modified-sound or notched-music device like [Neuromonics](#) or the [Levo System](#) that actually trains your brain not to hear the tinnitus.

Or, if you have hearing loss, hearing aids can help mask your tinnitus by improving your ability to hear actual sounds.

While currently there's no FDA approved drugs specifically designed to treat tinnitus, some antianxiety drugs and antidepressants have been effective in relieving symptoms. Another possibility to help quiet the noise is avoiding things that can aggravate the problem like salt, artificial sweeteners, sugar, alcohol, tonic water, tobacco and caffeine. And protect yourself from loud noises by wearing earplugs.

For more information on tinnitus treatment options, [visit the American Tinnitus Association](#).

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**Jim Miller is a contributor to NBC-TV's "Today" program and author of "The Savvy Senior." Send your questions to Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070; or visit [savvysenior.org](#).**

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