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**British Tinnitus  
Association**



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# 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 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

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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.

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

Cruickshanks KJ, Klein R, Klein BE, Wiley TL, Nondahl DM, Tweed TS. Cigarette smoking and hearing loss: the epidemiology of hearing loss study. *JAMA*. 1998;**279**:1715-9.

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Vanneste S, De Ridder D. The use of alcohol as a moderator for tinnitus-related distress. *Brain Topogr*. 2012;**25**:97-105.

## Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

## For further information

Our helpline staff can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics on **0800 018 0527**. You may also find our website **takeontinnitus.co.uk** helpful.

## 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

All about tinnitus\*

Complementary therapy for tinnitus: an opinion

Drugs and tinnitus

Ear wax removal and tinnitus

Flying and the ear

Food, drink and tinnitus

Hearing aids and tinnitus\*

Hyperacusis

Ideas for relaxation without sound

Information for musicians

Mindfulness for tinnitus

Musical hallucination (musical tinnitus)

Noise and the ear

Otosclerosis

Pulsatile tinnitus

Relaxation

Self help for tinnitus\*

Sound therapy

Sources of mutual support for tinnitus

Supporting someone with tinnitus

Taming tinnitus

Tinnitus and disorders of the temporo-mandibular joint (TMJ) and neck

Tinnitus: a parent's guide

Tinnitus: a teacher's guide

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

Tinnitus activity book (for 8-11 year olds)

Tinnitus activity book (for 11-16 year olds)

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