



TINNITUS

AND COVID-19.

FACT SHEET

In Australia, and around the world, many people have reported the onset of tinnitus or the worsening of their tinnitus during the Covid-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 INFECTION

A recent study conducted by the UK's University of Manchester and Manchester Biomedical Research Centre, published in the International Journal of Audiology, estimated that 7.6% of people infected with Covid-19 experience hearing loss, 14.8% experience tinnitus and 7.2% experience vertigo. However, the authors note that this research, which lacked control groups, was not of the highest quality. Ideally, studies compare two groups, looking for a difference. For example, a study might look at people who were hospitalised for any reason (the control group) as well as people hospitalised for COVID-19 and see if the patients with coronavirus were more likely to have tinnitus.

There are also factors connected to Covid-19 that can indirectly affect the experience of tinnitus. Covid-19 is a respiratory infection and a common symptom is a sensation of blocked ears and nose. This can cause the onset or worsening of tinnitus in some people. Generally, once the respiratory symptoms are resolved, the tinnitus also eases. It is important to note that fear, concern and anxiety associated with having a Covid test or contracting the disease may also increase tinnitus in some people.

Covid symptoms are treated with aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) eg. naproxen, ibuprofen. While high doses of NSAIDs for extended periods carry a risk of causing/aggravating tinnitus, the doses used to treat Covid are very unlikely to carry a risk. Hydroxychloroquine is not medically recommended for Covid, but some people have been taking it as a Covid treatment.

Quinine medications when used as a treatment, rather than the low levels used to prevent malaria or night cramps, can cause damage to the ear and carry a risk of tinnitus cause/aggravation. Importantly, do not change the medication you have been prescribed without first consulting your doctor. For more details about an adverse reaction to medication and the risk of causing/aggravating tinnitus, please refer to our "Drugs and tinnitus" fact sheet.

Sometimes, the neurological effects of post-Covid syndromes (often called "long Covid") can heighten the awareness of tinnitus. Although this a very new area of study, research is currently being undertaken to understand more about long Covid and its symptoms.

COVID-19 VACCINES

Data from the UK shows that tinnitus as a side effect of Covid-19 vaccination is rare, with one in 8000 people reporting experiencing tinnitus following Covid-19 vaccination. As with any spike in tinnitus following a known potential trigger, such as a new medication or vaccine, it can be difficult to know whether there has been a direct cause and effect between the two or whether the spike in tinnitus is connected to anxiety. Frustratingly, self-monitoring tinnitus - to check if the vaccine has affected it - can, by creating an awareness feedback loop, itself cause an increase in tinnitus. For people with pre-existing tinnitus, making an informed decision about vaccination and having the correct mindset is important. In the trials prior to their release, no mention was made of the onset of tinnitus or worsening tinnitus for any of the available vaccines.



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I've found my tinnitus way more intrusive during lockdown, I like to have voices and sound around me all the time and it's just been really quiet, which has been hard.

TINNITUS DURING THE PANDEMIC

It is well recognised that there is a strong association between Covid-19 and tinnitus because of a variety of environmental stressors and behaviour changes associated with the pandemic, rather than directly attributable to the virus itself. There is a strong link between stress and tinnitus and, for many people, life changes during the pandemic, such as working from home or missing social connection, have increased their stress levels.

SUPPORT SERVICES

In some cases, the impacts of tinnitus may lead you to feel you can no longer cope. If you are in need of urgent assistance, please call Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636. While the information provided will not be specific to tinnitus, their expertise in all areas of mental health will ensure you are supported at times of greatest need. All other, non-urgent persistent matters should be discussed with your audiologist or medical practitioner. Tinnitus Australia is available online and via the Hearing Line to offer extra support.

This factsheet is intended to be a guide of a general nature, having regard to general circumstances. The information presented should not be relied on as a substitute for medical advice, independent judgement or assessment by a healthcare professional, with consideration of the particular needs and individual circumstances. This factsheet reflects information available at the time of its preparation, but its currency should be determined having regard to other available information. Tinnitus Australia disclaims all liability to users of the information provided.

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For hearing, social & emotional
support, & general enquiries,
Monday to Friday,
9am - 5pm

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SOUNDFAIR INITIATIVE**

