

Ask the *expert*

Maren Stropahl on Tinnitus Management

Tinnitus is a wide-spread indication for which there is no cure yet. Recently, new scientific insights have led to a better understanding which approaches may successfully relieve the burden of tinnitus. We have talked to Dr. Maren Stropahl, who leads an initiative to develop and implement a new way of tinnitus management at Sonova Audiological Care. We discussed with her the correlation between tinnitus and hearing loss, current best practices, and why one size does not fit all tinnitus patients.

How many people are affected by tinnitus?

About 10-15% of the population are estimated to have tinnitus. The majority of those who experience tinnitus do not find it disturbing. However, about 20% need clinical support to cope with the perceived noise, and about 2% suffer so severely that managing their daily life is significantly disrupted by tinnitus (see chart 1). Tinnitus is a very individual percept and everyone suffering from tinnitus needs a personalized approach to get relief.

Is there a correlation between tinnitus and hearing loss?

The exact cause of tinnitus has not yet been determined. Over the last years, experts have identified that tinnitus is not just a problem of the auditory organ, but originates either in the peripheral, central, or even outside auditory brain regions. It has been shown that in case of tinnitus, there is often abnormal overactivity of neurons in the brain as well as abnormally synchronous firing activity of neurons. It seems that not only the auditory centers of the brain are affected, because other cortical networks also show an alteration.

Recent findings indicate that 4 out of 5 people affected by tinnitus also have hearing loss, even if it is not always identifiable by eg. the standard audiogram.

What steps should people with tinnitus take?

To date, there is no cure for tinnitus, but there are approaches that have been proven to significantly reduce the burden of tinnitus. To identify the burden of tinnitus on a person's life, a tinnitus assessment based on standardized questionnaires is recommended. For people suffering from tinnitus, education about the condition and potential treatment options is of utmost importance.

Therefore, education and counseling should be the basis for any more advanced treatment. The currently best validated therapy for tinnitus is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) that aims to change maladaptive behaviors and negative associations that arise from the perception of tinnitus, thereby reducing the negative impact of tinnitus on quality of life.

Complementary tinnitus management services:

For those with bothersome tinnitus, advanced tinnitus management can complement the hearing aids to provide further relief. Accumulating evidence suggests multimodal management approaches that combine education, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and potentially sound therapies.¹ Apps like SilentCloud™, offering advanced tinnitus management, empower patients to self-manage their tinnitus.

In how far can hearing aids help relieve the burden of tinnitus?

Hearing aids are known to improve speech understanding and to increase hearing-related quality of life. In case of a co-existing hearing loss, hearing aids are recommended for people suffering from tinnitus. In some cases, people with tinnitus also benefit of the amplification of environmental sounds as this can help to shift the attention away from the tinnitus sound. This can additionally be supported by the in-built sound generator that is nowadays available in almost all modern hearing aids.

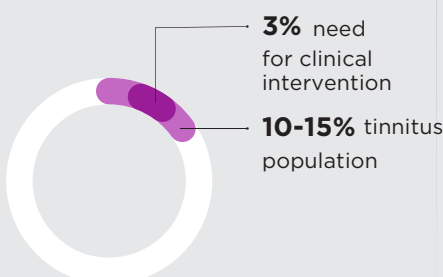
Which complementary tinnitus management services are there?

For those with bothersome tinnitus, advanced tinnitus management is recommended to complement the hearing aids to provide relief. Recent evidence suggests that multimodal or interdisciplinary approaches of tinnitus management seem to provide the best relief of people suffering from tinnitus.



Dr. Maren Stropahl,
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with a focus on tinnitus management at
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Overall population affected by tinnitus¹



Prevalence of hearing loss amongst tinnitus patients²



It is assumed that hearing loss triggers the central auditory system to adapt & compensate which then results in tinnitus.