

STILL Ringing in the NEW YEAR?

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Dr. Lisa Fox-Thomas counsels a patient with tinnitus.

2020 marks a new beginning for many people worthy of celebration, and an opportunity to set resolutions for improved health and happiness in the upcoming year. For some, eliminating bothersome ringing in their ears is at the top of their list.

Tinnitus is a term used to describe the perception of ringing, hissing, or roaring in the ears (or head). When tinnitus becomes annoying and intrusive, it can interfere with essential daily functions, such as concentration, relaxation, and sleep. Tinnitus also may seem to make communication difficult, although usually this is because tinnitus is a symptom of underlying hearing loss due to aging, noise exposure, or other causes. When tinnitus becomes a source of much distress, it is time to seek professional help. Medical doctors who specialize in disorders of the ear (called otologists or ENT physicians) can identify medically treatable causes of tinnitus such as ear wax or infections. When medical interventions for tinnitus are ruled out, many patients are told to “learn to live with it,” but how? Fortunately, there are management options available that can minimize the disturbance caused by tinnitus, even if it is not eliminated completely. Audiologists are doctoral-level professionals with specialized training in hearing and hearing-related disorders such as tinnitus who can help.

At UNC Greensboro Speech and Hearing Center, audiologists offer a holistic approach to tinnitus management that takes individual needs and preferences into account. Through a combination of informational counseling, sound therapy, and wellness strategies, patients can find a path to relief that works for them. Although there are no “quick fixes” or “cures” for tinnitus, the majority of patients report reduced awareness and disturbance over time. UNC Greensboro audiologists offer ongoing support and guidance to help patients achieve optimum results. Additional counseling may be recommended to address attitudes and beliefs about tinnitus that contribute to its perceived importance and the conscious attention it demands. Tinnitus management strategies focus on “neutralizing” tinnitus so that it is no longer perceived as bothersome, allowing patients to move tinnitus to the background where it belongs.

Because each person’s journey with tinnitus is different, it is important for audiologists to listen to an individual’s story and understand the impact of tinnitus on daily activities. UNC Greensboro Speech and Hearing Center offers a full-day evaluation that includes a comprehensive interview, diagnostic testing including tinnitus pitch and loudness matching, consultation about results, and demonstration of management options. Many patients with tinnitus report sound sensitivity, which also can be addressed. Intervention may include introduction of new tools for consistent daily support or incorporation of existing management strategies in a new way. Importantly, patients are encouraged to be active participants in developing a plan of care to help them accomplish their self-identified goals.

If you or someone you know struggles with bothersome or disabling tinnitus, contact the UNC Greensboro Speech and Hearing Center at 336-334-5939 to schedule an appointment for a brief consultation or comprehensive evaluation.

We look forward to hearing from you!