



AMERICAN TINNITUS ASSOCIATION

PATIENT NAVIGATOR

Navigating the healthcare system can be difficult, especially when dealing with a condition like tinnitus that lacks a definitive cure and differs between patients. The American Tinnitus Association (ATA) developed the *Patient Navigator* to help people find the best approach for their tinnitus. **The *Patient Navigator* is suitable both for those with recent sudden-onset tinnitus and those with a history of tinnitus that has become bothersome or has not been addressed.**

Stay calm

Tinnitus can be frightening, especially if it develops without warning, or without a clear trigger. It is important to stay calm because it is seldom indicative of a life-threatening medical condition.

**If your tinnitus symptoms were triggered by a traumatic physical event (head/neck damage, concussive trauma, etc.), you should seek immediate medical care.*

Visit your primary care provider (PCP) and audiologist

If your tinnitus continues beyond a week, becomes bothersome, starts to interfere with your sleep and/or your concentration, or makes you depressed or anxious, seek medical attention from a trained healthcare professional. Your PCP should be able to diagnose/rule out certain causes of tinnitus, such as obstructions in the ear canal or temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ), and provide a referral to the appropriate specialist. If no underlying medical issues are found, see an audiologist for a hearing assessment and evaluation of tinnitus treatment options.

**Please refer to ATA's Patient Intake Flowchart available at www.ATA.org*

Know your treatment options

ATA encourages patients to utilize its website to research tinnitus management options and to ask the questions listed below. Become a proactive participant in determining which management option best addresses your condition and needs:

- What tests do they suggest? What are the tests designed to reveal?
- What is their diagnosis?
- Have they ruled out physical causes of tinnitus: TMJ, head/neck trauma, tumors, etc.?
- Are they familiar with all current tinnitus management options?
- Which tinnitus management option is best for your situation? Do they offer this service?
- Which tinnitus treatments do they use in their practice?
- What is their treatment plan for you? Can they provide this service or refer you to another provider?
- How much will treatment cost? How many visits are likely needed? Is treatment covered by your insurance?
- Do they have any additional information for you to review?
- Is their advice based on the American Academy of Otolaryngology's *Clinical Practice Guideline: Tinnitus*?

Do not accept "learn to live with it" diagnoses

Many patients are misguided when told by healthcare providers that nothing can be done for tinnitus. While there is no cure at this time, there are evidence-based treatments that can significantly reduce the effect of tinnitus on daily activities and improve quality of life. If a medical professional says nothing can be done, get a second opinion from a hearing healthcare professional trained in tinnitus management.

Self care

Patients can improve their condition through general wellness and relaxation practices:

- **Increase Relaxation.** Patients often report tinnitus becomes less burdensome through regular activities designed to be relaxing, like yoga, meditation, and listening to music.
- **Sleep.** Tinnitus often disrupts sleep, so create a sleep strategy. This might include sound machines, radio static, or a fan to mask the sound of tinnitus. Reduction of caffeine, alcohol, and other drugs that might inhibit sleep is recommended.

Consider seeing a behavioral health therapist

Current estimates suggest that 48-78% of patients with severe tinnitus experience depression, anxiety, or some other behavioral disorder. A trained behavioral health therapist can often help mitigate the negative emotions accompanying bothersome tinnitus. There are behavioral and educational treatment programs for tinnitus management. General psychological therapy may also be beneficial.

Commit to action

Once you and your healthcare provider identify the best management option, fully commit to completing the treatment protocol. Many of the best tinnitus management therapies, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT), require ongoing, active patient participation, over a 6-12 month period.

Create a support network

Patients who are successful in managing tinnitus often have strong support networks, which might include a spouse, family, or friends who've been educated about tinnitus. A tinnitus support group can provide a forum among compassionate people facing similar challenges. ATA can assist in locating local tinnitus support groups or connecting you with Help Network Volunteers who are willing to share their own experiences with tinnitus via one-on-one phone calls or email correspondence.

* The ATA Patient Navigator is designed to apply to the broadest array of tinnitus cases. While most patients would be well served following this approach, the sound and effects of tinnitus are unique to each patient, so some patients may require a different approach.

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