

# DIET AND TINNITUS: What to eat....and what not to eat

Have you ever noticed that some days your tinnitus seems to worsen for no reason? Did you pause to think about what you ate recently? I have learned when I have a salty meal my tinnitus gets worse for several hours. The next day it will improve, providing I haven't taken in more excess salt. Maintaining a very good diet is critical in the management and lowering of tinnitus sounds. Many foods affect tinnitus, both positively and negatively, and it is important to understand which foods to avoid and which ones to consume.

Research has shown that it is very important for people who have tinnitus to consume a very good diet and to reduce or eliminate salt, simple sugars, saturated and trans-fats, nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol. For many of us this is easier said than done.

Let's go a step further and say that people who have tinnitus should reduce or eliminate fast foods and pre-packaged or processed foods. This is due to the addition of large amounts of salt, saturated fats, flavor enhancers and other chemicals meant to prolong shelf-life or enhance the flavor and appearance of the products. These chemicals are not food and have my undesirable side-effects. For the most part, they may negatively affect tinnitus and make it louder.

So how do we change our diet to a healthier regimen? One bite at a time. Becoming aware of what you eat is the first step to making better choices. The following are not absolute rules but they are guidelines for understanding how diet affects tinnitus. No one eats a perfect diet. However, being aware of these guidelines and incorporating them into your diet will improve your overall health and help you reduce you tinnitus. Generally speaking, anything that improves health also improves tinnitus. People with high blood pressure will improve tinnitus after the pressure is lowered, people with high cholesterol will have improvement with their when the cholesterol comes under control. Very typically, people who are overweight will have improvement after the extra pounds are shed.

## Salt

Salt has an immediate effect on tinnitus and may make it worse. Excess salt restricts blood vessels, increases blood pressure and reduces blood flow into the ears, eyes and brain. Increased blood pressure is directly linked to the increased tinnitus. There are high levels of salt in most processed and pre-packaged foods. A can of soup contains more sodium than the recommended daily allowance for an adult person. This is a primary reason to be very careful of these products.

## Sugar

Sugar metabolism has an important role to play in the proper functioning of the auditory system. The brain and auditory system are completely dependent on the regular delivery of oxygen and glucose (sugar) from the blood supply. When this supply of nutrients gets out of balance, damage to the auditory system can occur. Hyperinsulinemia (precursor to Type II Diabetes) occurs because the body becomes insensitive to insulin and ineffective in delivering sugar to the cells, where it is needed. Therefore the pancreas produces more and more insulin in order to process blood sugar. Studies have shown that a high proportion of people with tinnitus also have hyperinsulinemia. Research with on tinnitus showed that a high proportion of people with tinnitus had their tinnitus improve when the study participants followed a diet appropriate for diabetics. 76% of the study participants had moderate or complete resolution of their tinnitus.

## Sugar Substitutes

So, refined sugar and simple carbohydrates are something that should be avoided by people with tinnitus. The bad news is that many sugar substitutes are worse than sugar itself. One of the worst is



Aspartame, which is used in many diet colas and other diet foods. It is sold under the trade names NutraSweet, Equal, Spoonful and Indulge. Aspartame along with Glutamate, is an excitatory neurotransmitter in the brain. It causes neurons to fire repeatedly until they become depleted and die. This causes untold damage to the nervous system and can lead to neuro-degenerative conditions including tinnitus.

Natural sugars found in fruits and vegetables are perfectly safe and nutritious. Natural, refined sugars take longer to digest and do not provide a sugar rush to the bloodstream that triggers excess insulin production.

### **Flavor Enhancers**

Most processed pre-packaged foods contain flavor enhancers that make the food taste better. The primary flavor enhancer by the food industry is Monosodium Glutamate (MSG). MSG breaks down to Glutamate in the body. Glutamate, like Aspartame, is an excitatory neurotransmitter that triggers neurons to fire until they become depleted and die. In fact, for many of us, Glutamate is the primary villain causing our tinnitus.

### **Fats**

Saturated and trans-fats have multiple negative effects on the body and tinnitus. Saturated fats are not recommended for those with diabetes or hyperinsulinemia. They also increase bad cholesterol (LDL), decrease good cholesterol (HDL), increase triglycerides and lead to atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is not only a risk factor in heart disease and stroke but also significantly reduces blood flow. People with tinnitus need to increase blood flow to the inner ear to remove toxins and maintain healthy cells. Tinnitus, in fact, can be caused by nothing more than decreased blood flow to the inner ear.

Omega 3 fatty acids found in fish oil have been shown to reduce inflammation and pain. They act as anti-depressants and are helpful for regulating mood. They increase insulin sensitivity and are helpful for people with diabetes and hyperinsulinemia.

### **Mediterranean Diet**

The best diet to consume for all people as well as those of us with tinnitus consists of whole, freshly prepared foods, plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and nuts. This diet is laid out nicely in what has popularly become known as the "Mediterranean Diet". This diet recommends daily physical exercise. It employs plenty of pasta, fruits, vegetables, olive oil, cheese and yogurt on a daily basis. Several times a month red meat is consumed. It also allows for wine in moderation.

A healthy diet is not difficult; in fact, it is very simple. A general rule of thumb is the closer to its original state the food is when consumed, the better it is for us. Conversely, the more processed and changed to food is, the more we must exercise caution and restraint. The best part of this is that fresh food tastes much better than processed food.

**Reference:** <http://www.tinnitusformula.com/infocenter/articles/treatments/diet.aspx>

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