

MUSICAL TINNITUS

(musical hallucination)

Dr Thomas E Cope, PhD MRCP (Neurology)
Consultant Neurologist, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge

This information has been written to help you understand more about the form of tinnitus where music is heard. This is called musical hallucination, or musical tinnitus.

Summary

Musical tinnitus - usually called musical hallucination - is the experience of hearing music when none is being played.

In most people with musical hallucination, there is no underlying cause. There is not thought to be a connection to mental health conditions such as schizophrenia.

The intrusiveness of musical tinnitus can be managed with the techniques used to treat other forms of tinnitus.

Contents

What is musical hallucination?	2
What is musical hallucination like?	2
Who gets musical hallucination?	2
What causes musical hallucination?	2
Is it caused by my medications?	2
Is musical hallucination a psychiatric problem?	3
Can musical hallucination be treated?	3
For further information	3
References	3
Alternative formats	4
BTA publications	4
Feedback	4

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.

What is musical hallucination?

Musical hallucination (MH) is the experience of hearing music when none is being played. Hearing sound that no-one else can hear is quite common, but the experience is normally of a simple sound such as a buzzing, ringing, or sizzling: this is known as tinnitus. In a small number of people however, these experiences can be more complex and emotive, and music can be heard.

What is musical hallucination like?

Musical hallucinations have a compelling sense of reality and are often mistaken for real music until it becomes clear that none is being played. This is especially true when musical hallucinations are experienced for the first time.

The sounds are typically heard as short fragments of simple melodies - often from music heard regularly and familiar from youth and especially from hymns and carols.

Individuals with hearing loss sometimes notice that the music in these hallucinations sounds as it did when it was first heard and not how it would with their current level of hearing problems.

Who gets musical hallucination?

Although anyone can experience musical hallucination, it is more common in women than in men, as well as in those over 60 years of age.

Individuals who live alone, and those with hearing loss are also more likely to experience musical hallucination.

What causes musical hallucination?

In most individuals with musical hallucination there is no underlying cause found.

Very rarely, musical hallucination can be caused by serious conditions, for example by problems with the blood vessels in the brain or by brain tumours. In these conditions there are likely to be other symptoms, but your doctor might choose to perform some investigations to rule them out.

Musical hallucination is also more common in individuals who have epilepsy or Alzheimer's disease. It is therefore very important to mention to your doctor if you have musical hallucination and experience changes in your vision, dizziness, severe headaches, problems with your speech or difficulties with movements.

Is it caused by my medications?

Like tinnitus, quite a number of medications have been accused of causing or contributing to musical hallucination. These associations are not thought to be strong, and in most individuals who experience musical hallucination they are not due to medication.

The only exception to this are medications based on opium, such as tramadol, morphine sulphate and oxycodone, which have been shown to cause musical hallucination in rare cases.

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.

If you believe that your musical hallucination might be caused by one of these or another medication, it is important that you **do not stop taking it** or adjust the dosage without first discussing this with your general practitioner or the doctor who prescribed the medication.

Is musical hallucination a psychiatric problem?

Some people with musical hallucination are worried that it might represent a mental health condition, such as schizophrenia. Although in schizophrenia it is common to hear voices, it is in fact very rare to experience musical hallucination and there is thought to be no connection between the two conditions.

The majority of individuals with musical hallucination do not have any psychiatric disturbance, although musical hallucination is quite common in individuals who have a condition known as **obsessive compulsive disorder** (OCD), in which they experience repetitive, intrusive and distressing thoughts and feel strong urges to repeatedly perform actions such as hand washing.

Although it is estimated that around four in ten people with OCD will experience musical hallucination at some time in their life, it is a rare condition and it is important to note that the majority of individuals with musical hallucination do not have OCD.

Can musical hallucination be treated?

If musical hallucination has an underlying cause, addressing the cause can often also relieve musical hallucination.

The most common and easily treatable cause is hearing loss, so your doctor is likely to request that you undergo some tests of your hearing and, based on the results of this, may prescribe a hearing aid.

Many people find that musical hallucination becomes less intrusive once the condition has been explained to them and they have been reassured that there is no serious underlying cause.

If musical hallucination continues to be troublesome despite this, it can be managed with the techniques used to treat other forms of tinnitus. It might be appropriate to use medication to treat the underlying condition contributing to the musical hallucination and your doctor will be happy to discuss this with you.

For further information

The BTA Tinnitus Support Team can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics:

Telephone: **0800 018 0527**
Web chat: **tinnitus.org.uk**
Email: **helpline@tinnitus.org.uk**
Text/SMS: **07537 416841**

We also offer a free tinnitus e-learning programme, Take on Tinnitus at **www.takeontinnitus.co.uk**

References

Contact us by the methods above if you would like details of the references used in preparing this leaflet.

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.

Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

BTA publications

Our information leaflets are written by leading tinnitus professionals and provide accurate, reliable and authoritative information which is updated regularly. Please contact us if you would like to receive a copy of any of our information leaflets listed below, or they can be downloaded from www.tinnitus.org.uk.

*available in Easy Read

Leaflets for children

Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus (for under 8s)

Tinnitus (for 8-11 year olds)

Tinnitus (for 11-16 year olds)

Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus activity book

Tinnitus activity book (for 8-11 year olds)

Tinnitus activity book (for 11-16 year olds)

Leaflets for adults

All about tinnitus*

Complementary therapy for tinnitus: an opinion

Drugs and tinnitus

Ear wax removal and tinnitus

Flying and the ear

Food, drink and tinnitus

Hearing aids and tinnitus*

Hyperacusis

Ideas for relaxation without sound

Information for musicians

Mindfulness for tinnitus

Musical hallucination (musical tinnitus)

Noise and the ear

Otosclerosis

Pulsatile tinnitus

Relaxation

Self help for tinnitus*

Sound therapy

Sources of mutual support for tinnitus

Supporting someone with tinnitus

Taming tinnitus

Tinnitus: a parent's guide

Tinnitus: a teacher's guide

Tinnitus and cochlear implants

Tinnitus and disorders of the temporo-mandibular joint (TMJ) and neck

Tinnitus and severe-profound hearing loss

Tinnitus and sleep disturbance

Tinnitus and stress

Tinnitus services*

Feedback

We welcome feedback on all our information. You can pass your comments to our Communications Team:

Telephone: **0114 250 9933**

Email: communications@tinnitus.org.uk or by writing to us at the address overleaf.

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.

(T)
British Tinnitus
Association

British Tinnitus Association

Ground Floor, Unit 5, Acorn Business Park, Woodseats Close, Sheffield S8 0TB

Email: helpline@tinnitus.org.uk

Helpline: **0800 018 0527**

Text/SMS: **07537 416841**

Website: tinnitus.org.uk

The British Tinnitus Association. Registered charity no: 1011145 Company limited by guarantee no: 2709302.

Whilst the BTA makes every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information, it is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always see your GP/medical professional.