



TINNITUS

Let me start by saying that the majority of patients with tinnitus must learn to tolerate the ringing, buzzing, roaring, etc. This makes treating bothersome tinnitus frustrating for ENT physicians, audiologists, and patients. There are no FDA approved medications to treat tinnitus. All medications ever prescribed for tinnitus are off label use. They are medications that in various ways calm down or slow down nerve function and may help with tinnitus. Sometimes, we get lucky and tinnitus is due to an ear canal wax impaction or a middle ear problem that we are able to resolve. However, most tinnitus is due to inner ear (sensorineural) hearing loss or is brain generated tinnitus. Unless the tinnitus is incapacitating, most patients “just live with it.” If the tinnitus is associated with significant hearing loss, hearing aids are the best treatment option. By amplifying environmental sounds with hearing aids, the tinnitus may become less noticeable. There is also the possibility of “residual inhibition” whereby the tinnitus is less significant even when the hearing aids are not worn at night while sleeping. Another treatment option is masking technique. Patients leave the TV or fan on at night or purchase a sleep sound machine. There are also neuromodulation therapy units. They are costly and not covered by insurance so usually are not an option. However, if you have the funds, you could research them on line or discuss them with an our Doctor of Audiology, Gloria Cleveland. Two over the counter supplements are marketed to help with tinnitus. A six month trial is recommended. The chance of helping is low but still may be an option. There is a cost and supplements are not covered by insurance. One supplement is Lipoflavanoid and may be purchased through pharmacies. The other is Arches Tinnitus Relief Formula and may be purchased on line. Other medications for tinnitus are “off label” use and usually reserved for patients with incapacitating tinnitus. If you believe the tinnitus is incapacitating, we could try various medications. All of these in some way affect nerve impulses and in that way may help with tinnitus. For the most part, tinnitus is an abnormal nerve impulse. These medications may include nortriptyline, Xanax, gabapentin, or topamax. All of them have the potential for side effects. Fatigue or just “feeling different” seems to be the most common side effect.