

IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL TINNITUS AWARENESS WEEK 5–11.02.2018

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International Tinnitus Awareness Week, organised by the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing, was held from 5–11 February 2018.

Its purpose was to draw public attention to the problem of tinnitus, which often goes undiagnosed – even though a diagnosis is important.

About 98% of tinnitus cases are completely subjective, and only heard by the person themselves. Such noises cannot be measured, controlled, or recorded. It can be generated at every level of the auditory path – starting from the external auditory canal and ending at the auditory cortex.

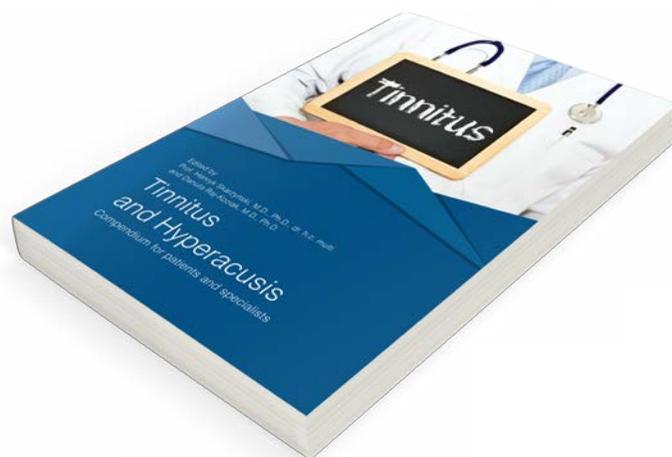
Mostly, however, tinnitus derives from the inner ear, more specifically that part which is responsible for hearing, i.e. the cochlea. Damage to the hair cells in the cochlea can cause tinnitus as a symptom.

The causes of damage can vary. Recent theories suggest that as a result of damage to the peripheral auditory system, the amount of sound information transmitted to the auditory brain centers is reduced. In response, the central nervous system increases activity at the level of the cerebral cortex, and that is perceived as tinnitus.

So tinnitus itself is not a disease, but a symptom, and it may also arise in the course of various diseases, e.g. cardiovascular or metabolic disorders. Tinnitus may appear after a less than full recovery from a viral infection, e.g. flu, or from ear or throat inflammation. Acoustic trauma can be another reason for persistent tinnitus. It often accompanies hearing loss associated with aging, but also hearing loss caused by the harmful effects of noise.

It is estimated that 20% of adult Poles suffer from tinnitus, while for about 5% of patients it is a major problem. According to research conducted by the Institute, clinically significant tinnitus (i.e. lasting over 5 minutes) also occurs in 6% of children, so tinnitus is not just a problem of older people.

According to Prof. Henryk Skarżyński of IPPH, when tinnitus occurs, an audiological diagnosis should always be performed. Tinnitus never appears without a reason – it is always a signal that something is not working as it should. With proper testing, it is possible to detect early changes, including health- or life-threatening ones such as cancers, which call for rapid surgical intervention.



According to Dr. n. med. Danuta Raj-Koziak of IPPH, research has shown that tinnitus in young adults is most often a result of viral or bacterial respiratory tract infections, severe or chronic stress, or excess noise leading to acoustic trauma, e.g. due to listening to loud music through headphones. On the other hand, in people over 50, tinnitus is mainly associated with chronic diseases of the circulatory system. A common cause is unstable or untreated hypertension. It appears that fluctuating blood pressure – sudden ups and downs – impair blood supply to the inner ear, which may permanently damage cochlear hair cells.

Due to aging of the Polish population and a growing number of patients, tinnitus has become an important area of the Institute's activity, not just clinically but also scientifically. As part of scientific and research projects, specialists from the Tinnitus Department at IPPH are focusing on methods that allow the clinician to assess the scale of the tinnitus problem from the patient's perspective. Many questionnaires are suitable for this purpose, and researchers from the Institute have chosen the best of them from around the world and translated and adapted them into Polish.

According to Dr Raj-Koziak, an important goal of IPPH is to implement new therapeutic methods, such as neurofeedback. Due to the frequently observed co-occurrence of tinnitus and diseases of the cervical spine, it is also

planned to extend our treatment offerings with physiotherapy. As well, we are going to extend the patient psychotherapy program with relaxation exercises.

Some important research projects currently being carried out by specialists from the Tinnitus Department include assessment of tinnitus annoyance in children, hyperacusis associated with tinnitus, and pulsatile tinnitus.

A team of psychologists from the Tinnitus Department have developed an original way of rehabilitating patients with tinnitus. The Institute conducts a weekly outpatient clinic where patients learn how to deal with the emotional effects of tinnitus. It consists of three thematic blocks: (1) psychological interaction therapy; (2) relaxation therapy using music and body work; and (3) exercises that improve concentration. The results of these therapies appear very promising.

During the Awareness Week, Dr Raj-Koziak spoke many times on radio and television about the causes and effects of tinnitus and possible methods of therapy.

She was a guest of TVP info and Polsat News, „Four Seasons of the Year” broadcast on Polish Radio, „Regional Magazine” of Radio Dla Ciebie, and „Regional News” on TVP 3 Warsaw. Material for the Newseria Information

Agency was also recorded. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Dr Raj-Koziak widely recommended a booklet, “Tinnitus and Hyperacusis”, edited by Prof. Henryk Skarżyński and herself, which is addressed to both patients and experts.

Press releases about tinnitus also appeared in the daily press, including

- Gazeta Polska Codziennie,
- Dziennik Wschodni,
- Dziennik Polska The Times,
- Polska Metropolia Warszawska, and
- Polska Metropolia Warszawska.

Information on the Awareness Week was also published on about 40 webpages, including

- www.twojezdrowie.rmffm24,
- www.rynekzdrowia.pl, and others.

Information about the Week was posted on two social media profiles of the Institute and reached over 18,000 recipients.

Moreover, IPPH prepared electronic versions of posters which were placed at ‘info stalls’ at the World Hearing Center. They were visited daily by around 800 patients and their families.

