

TINNITUS – ALL YOU SHOULD KNOW. REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL TINNITUS WEEK

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International Tinnitus Week, with participation of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing, was celebrated from 6 to 12 February 2017. Part of a special event in Warsaw was an information campaign aimed at drawing attention to low public awareness of tinnitus. It is estimated that about 20% of adult Poles experience tinnitus. Correct diagnosis and treatment can lead to a significant improvement in a patient's quality of life.

Tinnitus is a sound heard in one or both ears, or in the head, often described by patients as a squeaking, ringing, rumbling, whistling, or rustling. Regardless of the nature of the sounds, they are all called tinnitus.

Almost everyone experiences temporary “ringing” in the ears, a phenomenon often heard in a quiet environment. Such temporary sounds are not annoying, aren't a clinical symptom, and don't require medical treatment. But according to Dr Danuta Raj-Koziak from the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing (IPPH), all cases of tinnitus that last longer than 5 minutes and occur more often than once a week might be helped by medical attention.

Tests to gauge the incidence of tinnitus in people 17 to 29 years old find figures of 4.7 to 5.7%. The incidence of tinnitus increases with age: up to 13–35% in those aged 70 to 79 years. Tests done by IPPH in Poland in 1999–2000 showed that about 20% of Poles over 18 years old report tinnitus. The tests were performed in three regions of Poland: Mazovia, Podlasia, and Silesia, which are different in terms of industrialization and environmental pollution. The sample was a group of over 12,000 randomly chosen people, and a trained researcher filled in a questionnaire based on an interview. Some 4.8% of the subjects said they had continuous tinnitus. Again, the incidence of tinnitus increased with age: in people less than 25 years old the incidence of tinnitus was estimated as 9.7%, and in those over 75 years old it was 52.8%.

Hearing screening tests conducted in 2015 by IPPH on Polish school children in Warsaw showed that 6% of them had clinically significant tinnitus (i.e. tinnitus during the day that lasted more than 5 minutes). Also nearly 50% of secondary-school students in Warsaw experienced temporary tinnitus, which started and stopped after a loud episode, for example. On this basis, according to Prof. Henryk Skarzynski, director of IPPH, tinnitus is not only a problem of the elderly.



Compendium for patients and specialists “Tinnitus and Hyperacusis” edited by Henryk Skarzynski and Danuta Raj-Koziak

In cases of persistent tinnitus, an audiological examination should be performed. Tinnitus never starts without a cause – it is always a signal that something is not working properly. In the future, diagnosis and treatment of tinnitus will become a major challenge for the health care system, especially in countries with an aging population. A thorough knowledge of tinnitus is important, as the right treatment can provide a significant improvement in quality of life. In practical terms, it can mitigate absenteeism caused by tinnitus, for example. Tinnitus can also give rise to secondary symptoms such as disorders of the nervous system, blood circulation, and metabolism.

To improve general awareness of tinnitus, specialists from IPPH talked about the topic on Polish radio. Prof. Skarzynski spoke on „Serwis Trojki” (“Radio III News”) and „Zapraszamy do trojki” (“Welcome to Radio III”). Dr Danuta Raj-Koziak spoke on „Cztery Pory Roku” (“Four Seasons”); she also talked about tinnitus on Polish television on the program “Question for Breakfast”. She recommended a book to viewers called “Tinnitus and Hyperacusis: Compendium for patients and specialists” edited by Prof. Skarzynski and Dr Raj-Koziak, issued specially for International Tinnitus Week.

More information about Tinnitus Week can be found on the internet (www.rynekzdrowia.pl; www.otolaryngologia.pl; www.forumakademickie.pl; www.polskieradio.pl; www.pytanie.nasniadanie.tvp.pl) and on social networks.