Ear Pain and Tinnitus

IMPORTANT:
If you have ear pain or tinnitus you should request a full ear examination before considering physiotherapy.

If all the tests and examinations reveal that your ears are in good health and there is no obvious reason for your symptoms, it is possible they are arising from joint stiffness or muscle tension around the neck (Cervical spine) or jaw (Temporomandibular joint). Tinnitus arising from these structures is referred to as Somatosensory Tinnitus.
Muscle Tension

Several neck and jaw muscles can refer pain to the ear. Tension in these muscles has also been proven to influence tinnitus.

The diagrams show pain referral patterns for a selection of the muscles that could be contributing to your symptoms.

Releasing trigger points in the relevant muscles can significantly reduce both pain and tinnitus sensation.

I can assess for trigger points and muscle shortening for all muscles potentially contributing to your symptoms and offer a combination of manual therapy and home exercises to manage this.
Cervical Spine

- Nerves emerging from between the 2nd and 3rd cervical vertebrae (C2 and C3) provide sensation around the ear, back of head and neck.

- Stiffness or dysfunction of these joints can affect transmission along these nerves, potentially causing pain in the areas shaded yellow and blue on this chart.

- By its neural connections to the ear, dysfunctional joint movements and pain can also lead to a type of tinnitus called 'cervicogenic somatosensory tinnitus', which, put simply, means tinnitus caused by sensory input from the cervical spine.

- Manual therapy, along with neck exercises to gain better movement, can help to relieve symptoms.

Temporomandibular Joint – dysfunction of the temporomandibular joint (TMD) may also cause ear pain or tinnitus via similar pathways to the cervical spine. Download my file on TMD to see how physiotherapy can help with this.

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TINNITUS: How Do I know if Physiotherapy can help?

Diagnostic criteria have recently been agreed for somatosensory tinnitus*. With the exception of dental diseases, if you can answer ‘yes’ to at least one question from each of the following 3 criteria there is a good chance that physiotherapy can help you to manage your tinnitus.

1) Tinnitus changes with certain activity:

If you answer ‘yes’ to any of the following, this strongly suggests a somatosensory influence on your tinnitus:

• Movement of your head, jaw or eyes can change the volume or pitch of your tinnitus.
• Somatic manoeuvres can change the volume or pitch of your tinnitus.
• Pressure on trigger points in the muscles of your jaw or neck can change the volume or pitch of your tinnitus.

Click on the video link below to see how you can test yourself:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sZxJ2s0NAI&feature=youtu.be

2) Tinnitus Characteristics:

If any of the following characteristics are present, this strongly suggests a somatosensory influence on your tinnitus:

• Tinnitus and neck or jaw pain complaints appeared simultaneously
• Tinnitus and neck/jaw pain symptoms aggravate simultaneously
• Tinnitus was preceded by a head or neck trauma
• Tinnitus increases during bad postures
• One sided tinnitus that is not accounted for by your audiogram, and that varies in volume or pitch

*From <http://europepmc.org/article/MED/30213235>
How Do I Know if Physiotherapy can help?

3) Symptoms that Accompany Tinnitus:

If any of the following symptoms are present, this strongly suggests a somatosensory influence on your tinnitus:

• Tinnitus is accompanied by frequent pain in the cervical spine, head or shoulder girdle
• Tinnitus is accompanied by tenderness in trigger points of the jaw or neck muscles.
• Tinnitus is accompanied by increased muscle tension in the muscles at the base of your skull
• Tinnitus is accompanied by increased muscle tension in the muscles at the back of your neck
• Tinnitus is accompanied by temporomandibular disorders
• Tinnitus is accompanied by teeth clenching or bruxism
• Tinnitus is accompanied by dental diseases

If you have answered ‘yes’ to at least one statement from each of the three categories, please get in touch – I may be able to help:

https://mobilejointsphysiotherapy.com/