

# Study casts doubt on caffeine link to tinnitus

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(PhysOrg.com) -- New research has found giving up caffeine does not relieve tinnitus and acute caffeine withdrawal might add to the problem. This is the first study of its kind to look at the effect of caffeine consumption on tinnitus.

The study, by the Centre for Hearing and Balance Studies at Bristol University and supported by a grant from Deafness Research UK, is published online in the *International Journal of Audiology*.

Researchers carried out the first pseudo-randomised, double-blinded, [placebo](#) controlled study of phased [caffeine](#) withdrawal and abstinence to test for a connection between [caffeine consumption](#) and tinnitus. The aim of the study was to provide evidence for therapeutic practice to the tinnitus community.

Sixty-six volunteers who experienced tinnitus and who usually consumed at least 150 mg a day of caffeine took part in a 30-day trial. Their usual caffeinated tea and coffee was replaced with double-blinded supplies, under one of two conditions: usual caffeine consumption followed by phased withdrawal; or phased withdrawal followed by reintroduction then usual caffeine consumption.

The study was designed so that the participants didn't know about the conditions. They knew they would receive caffeine on some days, but not on others, but did not know which days were which. Participants were required to complete a questionnaire to measure their tinnitus three times during the study - at the start, after they had been withdrawn from caffeine for ten days and after they had consumed their normal amount of caffeine for ten days. The participants also kept a very brief record of their tinnitus symptoms each day.

Dr Lindsay St. Claire, Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Hearing and Balance Studies at the University of Bristol, and the lead researcher on the study, said: "With almost 85 per cent of adults in the world consuming caffeine daily, we wanted to challenge the claim that caffeine makes tinnitus worse. Many professionals support caffeine withdrawal as a tinnitus therapy, even though there is a lack of any relevant evidence, and, in fact, acute symptoms of caffeine withdrawal might even make tinnitus worse.

"Many other dietary restrictions are claimed to alleviate tinnitus without the support from controlled studies. Further work in this area would be of great benefit to people with tinnitus and their clinicians."

Deafness Research UK's Chief Executive, Vivienne Michael, added: "For many years, there has been a commonly held belief that caffeine is a major aggravator of tinnitus symptoms although there is very little evidence to support this. In the UK alone, we estimate that for over half

a million people, tinnitus has a negative effect on their quality of life.

“This new paper reports on a detailed analysis of the effects of caffeine consumption, withdrawal, abstinence and the severity of tinnitus symptoms. It provides the first experimental evidence to challenge the theory that caffeine triggers or aggravates tinnitus.”

Tinnitus affects nearly 15 per cent of adults in the UK at any one time and caffeine is consumed daily by approximately 85 per cent of adults globally.

**More information:** St Claire L, Stothart G, McKenna L, Rogers P: ‘Caffeine abstinence: an ineffective and potentially distressing tinnitus therapy’. *International Journal of Audiology*, January 2010, Vol 49, No 1, Pages 24-29. [informahealthcare.com/doi/full ... 09/14992020903160884](https://informahealthcare.com/doi/full/10.1080/14992020903160884)

Provided by University of Bristol

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