

## **Traumatic Brain Injury: Tinnitus (Ringing In The Ears) After Brain Injury**

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Many traumatic brain injury patients suffer tinnitus – ringing in the ears. For most of these patients, the tinnitus is temporary, but for some it is permanent. Tinnitus may be in one ear or both ears and can be a ringing, buzzing, hissing or clicking sound. Tinnitus may be constant or intermittent. Living with tinnitus is often a nightmare for the patient, interfering with sleep, daily conversations, and the inability to enjoy silence. Patients with tinnitus often suffer fatigue, headaches, lack of concentration, and depression.

Tinnitus after brain injury occurs as a result of damage to the inner ear, damage to the auditory nerves, or damage to the neural pathways involved in hearing. If the tinnitus persists for many months or over one year, it is likely that the tinnitus is permanent.

The diagnosis of tinnitus after a mild brain injury is often a diagnosis of exclusion. In such situations, the patient may show no abnormalities in audiological testing, including an audiogram, (measure of hearing) or a tympanogram (measure of eardrum function). While such patients do not have any damage to their inner ear, the devastation of having to live with tinnitus is just as real.

The trial lawyer handling a traumatic brain injury case in which his or her client has suffered tinnitus should develop evidence to demonstrate the tinnitus for the jury and the devastation it causes the client. In several of our cases, we have had an audiologist measure the frequency and loudness of our clients' tinnitus and reproduce and record the sound. There is no substitute for actually playing the sound of the client's tinnitus for the jury. Once the jurors actually hear what the client has to live with, they are much more receptive to testimony from the client and his or her witnesses about how annoying and disruptive the tinnitus is on the client's life.

Having a thorough understanding and appreciation for tinnitus following brain injury is essential for the trial lawyer handling traumatic brain injury cases.

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