

Eating Certain Foods Helps Lower Your Risk of Tinnitus

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › A recent large-scale meta-analysis found that people who ate more fruit had significantly lower odds of developing tinnitus than those with low fruit intake
- › Dairy, fiber, and caffeine showed protective benefits as well. Moderate intake of these foods improved circulation, reduced inflammation, and supported inner ear stability
- › A separate study also found that consuming butter and legumes helped calm tinnitus symptoms and stabilize auditory nerve activity
- › MSG and aspartame aggravated symptoms by overstimulating nerves. These common additives disrupt your brain chemistry, heighten auditory sensitivity, and worsen tinnitus by triggering excitotoxic reactions, especially in sensitive individuals
- › Eating whole foods and avoiding excitotoxins is a key strategy. Eliminate processed foods and focus on nutrient-rich meals to reduce nerve overload, balance blood sugar, and protect your auditory system

Tinnitus is the perception of sound – often ringing, buzzing, or clicking – without any external source. It's not just annoying; it's also debilitating. Common symptoms include persistent phantom noise in one or both ears, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating.

Over time, if ignored, tinnitus will fuel depression, increase stress hormones, and severely impact your quality of life. The global prevalence now hovers around 14.4% in adults and 13.6% in children,¹ with some estimates even higher in specific populations.

Despite its growing impact, most people are still told there's no known cause, and worse, no effective treatment.

However, recent studies provide a practical insight into tinnitus prevention – simply including certain nutrient-dense foods in your meals will help influence nerve health and blood flow, reducing its symptoms.

A Large Meta-Analysis Identified Dietary Patterns Linked to Tinnitus Risk

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in *BMJ Open*² brought together data from over 301,533 adults across eight observational studies. Using validated questionnaires,³ the research team set out to assess 15 dietary factors that influence the likelihood of developing tinnitus. Their focus was not on supplements or isolated nutrients, but on actual food intake patterns in everyday life.

- **Four specific foods had protective effects** – Adults 18 and older were included regardless of whether they had pre-existing health issues. Of the 15 dietary factors analyzed – like sugar, fat, meat, and vegetables – only four stood out as protective – fruit, fiber, dairy, and caffeine.
- **Fruit offered statistically significant protection against tinnitus** – Fruit intake had the most dramatic effect, reducing tinnitus odds by 35%, making it the most powerful dietary variable in the entire analysis. The odds ratio for fruit was 0.649, showing a strong inverse relationship between fruit intake and tinnitus risk.
- **No notable link was seen between tinnitus prevention and vegetables** – Surprisingly, vegetables didn't have the same consistent benefit, highlighting fruit as the better choice for prevention.
- **These effects held up across diverse global populations** – The studies included participants from the U.K. Biobank and Australia's Blue Mountains Hearing Study, making the results more applicable to a wide population.

Why Do Fruits Offer Protective Effects Against Tinnitus?

The researchers conducted sensitivity analysis – where one study is removed to see if results change – to gather more robust results. These tests showed that the protective effects of fruit and fiber remained steady. Other foods, including sugar, meat, and even diet variety, failed to show a consistent protective link.

This was likely due to inconsistencies in measurement or how the foods were prepared and consumed. The researchers outlined three primary biological mechanisms to explain fruit's benefits, mainly:

- **Fruits offer impressive antioxidants effects** – Fruits are loaded with antioxidants like vitamin C, polyphenols, and carotenoids. These nutrients fight oxidative stress, which is one of the key drivers of cellular damage in the cochlea – the part of your inner ear responsible for hearing.
- **They improve blood flow to auditory structures** – Fruit promotes vascular health and enhances endothelial function, which is the ability of blood vessels to relax and contract. This improves circulation, which ensures sensitive structures in the inner ear get the oxygen and nutrients they need. Poor circulation is known to contribute to tinnitus symptoms over time.
- **Eating fruit reduces chronic inflammation in nerve pathways** – The anti-inflammatory effects of flavonoids like quercetin protect auditory nerves from overstimulation. This helps keep neural signaling steady, reducing the kind of faulty signals that cause ringing or buzzing in the ears. Inflammation interferes with normal nerve firing and amplifies sensory perception, both of which worsen tinnitus.

Dairy, Fiber, and Caffeine Also Provided Benefits Against Tinnitus

One of the most surprising findings was that avoiding dairy actually increased tinnitus risk. While some conventional advice recommends avoiding dairy products like cheese and butter⁴ if you have tinnitus, the data in this review suggested consuming these

foods supports auditory health.

- **Consuming dairy reduced the risk of tinnitus by 17%** – It improved vascular tone and supported the same endothelial functions that fruit did. The type of dairy wasn't specified, but the implication was that unprocessed or minimally processed dairy offers support, while highly processed versions might not.
- **Consuming fiber was associated with 9% lower risk** – It improved insulin sensitivity and blood vessel health, which are two major systems tied to how the inner ear functions.
- **Fiber improved insulin balance, which impacts inner ear fluid pressure** – The benefit of fiber was tied to better blood sugar regulation. When insulin sensitivity is low, excess insulin circulates in the bloodstream, which disrupts fluid and electrolyte balance in the ear. That destabilization affects how sound is transmitted and processed, which worsen tinnitus if left uncorrected.
- **Moderate caffeine intake reduced tinnitus risk by 10%** – The idea that caffeine worsens tinnitus is still common, but this analysis disproved it. Contrary to outdated advice, consuming caffeine in moderation improves alertness, boosts dopamine, and increases blood flow – all of which support auditory processing. It also blocks adenosine receptors, which help reduce inflammation in brain areas involved in sound perception.

The authors recognize that they cannot completely confirm the causality due to the observational design of the included studies. They also note that conducting further large-scale studies will "complement and verify the relationship between dietary intake and tinnitus."^{5,6}

Butter and Legumes Were Both Linked to Reduced Tinnitus Severity

A similar study published in *Nutrients*⁷ surveyed over 11,000 adults with tinnitus to assess how different food choices relate to how severe their symptoms feel. The researchers focused on how loud, constant, or intrusive the symptoms were depending on your dietary habits.

The study analyzed more than 50 dietary variables using a large pool of participants with varying backgrounds. This made the results more reflective of how diet influences tinnitus in everyday life. Two examples of dietary factors they looked at include dairy – specifically butter – and legumes.

- **Butter intake was linked to less tinnitus severity** – Just like the BMJ Open study, this study also found that dairy has protective effects against tinnitus. Contrary to some mainstream beliefs about avoiding saturated fat, the study showed that people who used butter regularly experienced lower tinnitus severity.

According to the researchers, “Those who reported a normal or high use of butter had a significantly reduced risk of tinnitus onset (compared to those who do not use butter).”⁸ This protective link suggests butter helps support auditory function.

- **Legumes also reduced the severity of symptoms** – People who regularly consumed legumes (beans, lentils, or chickpeas) reported milder tinnitus, the researchers reported. Legumes were associated with calmer symptoms, which could be explained by their high content of magnesium, fiber, and B vitamins. These nutrients support vascular health and stabilize nerves, two key areas that affect how the brain processes sound.
- **Legumes help balance blood sugar and calm inflammation** – The research team emphasized the connection between blood sugar regulation and inner ear function. Legumes help stabilize glucose and improve insulin sensitivity, which reduces inflammation. Better blood sugar control helps reduce the kind of fluid and nerve imbalances that make tinnitus worse.

The takeaway isn't just about "eating healthy" – it's about eating smart. The key is to identify foods that calm your nervous system and improve blood flow, and both butter and legumes show promise in this, in different but complementary ways. Adding them to your diet will support better outcomes when dealing with tinnitus.

These Artificial Ingredients Trigger Nerve Overload That Make Tinnitus Worse

Eating the right types of foods is beneficial, but what you DON'T eat matters, too. In particular, chemical additives like monosodium glutamate (MSG) and the artificial sweetener aspartame were found to contribute to tinnitus symptoms.⁹ These additives act as excitotoxins, meaning they overstimulate your nerve cells until they're damaged or die. This mechanism also fuels nerve dysfunction that causes or worsens tinnitus.

- **MSG overstimulates glutamate receptors in the auditory system** – Widely used in fast food, instant noodles, chips, and restaurant meals to enhance flavor, MSG works by exciting glutamate receptors in the brain. These same receptors are found in the auditory system.¹⁰ According to research,¹¹ people who have tinnitus have high levels of glutamate, which leads to hyperexcitability in their auditory cortex.
- **Aspartame breaks down into chemicals that overexcite the brain** – When ingested, aspartame (a sweetener found in diet sodas and sugar-free foods) converts in the body into three compounds – aspartic acid, which produces aspartate, a highly stimulating neurotransmitter; the amino acid phenylalanine; and methanol, or wood alcohol.¹²
- **Aspartate damages neurons in the brain** – It disrupts normal neurotransmitter balance and creates chaos in the brain's sound-processing centers. This amplifies tinnitus symptoms and lead to heightened perception of noise that isn't really there.
- **Both additives gradually worsen tinnitus by overstimulating nerve cells** – The effects of MSG and aspartame build quietly over time. You might not notice their effects after one meal, but repeated exposure continues to overstimulate the

auditory nerves. If you're already dealing with tinnitus, this overstimulation will turn manageable noise into a constant, distressing hum that gets harder to ignore.

- **MSG and aspartame cross your blood-brain barrier** — These chemicals lead to cellular stress and eventual nerve damage. This not only worsens ringing but also increases the risk of long-term hearing dysfunction.

The solution — eat clean and check food labels carefully. Removing these toxic chemicals from your diet will make an immense difference between constant suffering and much-needed silence.

Eat More Whole Foods and Avoid Processed Foods

Based on these studies, it's clear that the root cause of tinnitus isn't just aging or random nerve damage — it's overstimulation of your nervous system, blood sugar instability, inflammation, and poor circulation in your inner ear. The wrong foods worsen the symptoms, and right ones help curb them. Here are five dietary strategies to help you cope with tinnitus.

1. **Cut out aspartame, MSG, and other excitotoxins immediately** — If you're still drinking diet sodas, chewing sugar-free gum, or eating foods labeled with "autolyzed yeast," "hydrolyzed protein," or "natural flavors," you're feeding the very system that's making your tinnitus worse. Remove them from your kitchen and don't look back. Most people feel relief in less than a week when they stop.
2. **Eat more fruit — especially high-antioxidant, water-rich varieties** — Fruit helps reduce oxidative stress, improves microcirculation in the cochlea, and supports your nerve function. Start slow with easy-to-digest options like watermelon, oranges with pulp, or ripe papaya. Aim for at least two to three servings a day, and space them out to stabilize blood sugar.

3. Use real butter, not seed oils or margarine – If you’ve been using vegetable oils (like canola and soy oil) or butter substitutes thinking they’re healthier, it’s time to reverse that.

4. Add legumes like lentils or chickpeas three to four times per week – If you are sensitive to fiber or deal with gas and bloating, try pressure-cooked lentils or soaked split mung beans to start. These are easier on your gut and still deliver the same auditory and neurological benefits. You don’t need a huge portion – just a small bowl alongside your meal is enough.

One drawback when consuming legumes is they contain lectins, which are sugar-binding plant proteins that can have adverse effects. You can sidestep this issue by preparing and cooking legumes properly to reduce their lectin content. Read [“How to Reduce Lectins in Your Diet”](#) for more detailed instructions.

5. Drink caffeine in moderation – Moderate daily intake, like one strong coffee or a couple cups of green tea, will help reduced tinnitus severity. However, too much caffeine could backfire, especially if it triggers anxiety or insomnia for you.

Your symptoms are giving you clues. The trick is learning to listen to what your body is asking for – then feeding it the calm, stabilizing foods that keep the volume down.

Remember These Tips to Protect Your Hearing

Protecting yourself from loud noises is the first step in preventing both tinnitus and hearing loss. Follow these basic strategies:

- Turn down the volume on personal audio devices.
- Download a decibel meter app for your smartphone, which will flash a warning if the volume is turned up to a damaging level.
- Wear earplugs when you visit noisy venues. If you work in a noisy environment, be sure to wear ear protection at all times.

- Use carefully fitted noise-canceling earphones/headphones, which allows you to listen comfortably at a lower volume.
- Limit the amount of time you spend engaged in noisy activities.
- Take regular listening breaks when using personal audio devices.
- Restrict the daily use of personal audio devices to less than one hour.
- If you live in a very noisy area, consider moving. If this is not an option, consider adding acoustical tile to your ceiling and walls to buffer noise. Double-paneled windows, insulation, heavy curtains and rugs also help reduce noise volume.
- Use sound-blocking headphones to eliminate occasional sound disturbances such as that from traffic or lawnmowers. Wear ear protection when using your lawnmower or leaf blower.
- Improve your sleep quality. Sleep interruptions and poor sleep quality worsen tinnitus symptoms, creating a sleeping environment that supports uninterrupted and restorative rest is essential. To learn more about this, read [“The Hidden Impact of Napping on Tinnitus.”](#)

In addition, I recommend addressing your nutrient deficiencies, as certain ones increase your risk. Magnesium deficiency is one example; studies have demonstrated that supplementing with magnesium helped improve hearing in participants who suffer from tinnitus or hearing loss.¹³ For more examples of nutrients that impact tinnitus and hearing loss, read [“Can Magnesium Relieve Your Tinnitus?”](#)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About How Foods Affect Tinnitus

Q: What foods are most effective at lowering the risk of developing tinnitus?

A: Fruit is the standout performer, with one large meta-analysis showing a 35% reduced risk for those who eat more of it. Fiber, dairy, and caffeine also had protective effects – each improving nerve function, blood flow, or inflammation control in the auditory system.

Q: Do certain foods reduce the severity of existing tinnitus symptoms?

A: Yes. A separate study of over 11,000 adults found that those who consumed butter and legumes regularly experienced less severe tinnitus. These foods support vascular health, stabilize nerves, and improve blood sugar balance – key factors in calming auditory symptoms.

Q: What ingredients or additives should I avoid if I have tinnitus?

A: You should eliminate MSG and aspartame immediately. These additives overstimulate your nerve cells, especially those involved in hearing, and worsen tinnitus over time. They're often hidden in processed foods, diet drinks, seasonings, and low-calorie snacks.

Q: Is caffeine safe for people with tinnitus, or does it make it worse?

A: Contrary to common advice, moderate caffeine intake actually helps. Studies show it reduces tinnitus risk by around 10%, likely due to its effects on circulation, dopamine, and inflammation. The key is moderation – not elimination or excess.

Q: What are the best daily strategies for managing tinnitus through diet?

A: Start by eating more fruit, legumes, and whole foods, using real butter instead of seed oils. Eliminate excitotoxins like MSG and aspartame, and drink caffeine in controlled amounts. These changes target the actual root causes – nerve overstimulation, inflammation, and poor circulation.

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