

Chronic tinnitus: An interplay between somatic and psychological factors.

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Abstract:

Chronic tinnitus is a common, sometimes highly distressing phenomenon that can be triggered and maintained by an interplay of physical and psychological factors. Partnering with clinical psychology and psychosomatic medicine, modern otolaryngology integrates both medical (e.g., hearing loss) and psychological influences (e.g., interactions between biographical experiences, personality traits, subjective evaluation of intrapsychic and interpersonal stimuli, emotional states, and intrapsychic or interpersonal emotion regulation strategies). Both groups of variables can influence the intensity and course of chronic tinnitus symptomatology both directly and indirectly, whereby the quality and relative degrees of psychological and physical components in a person's self-experience can fluctuate. With this in mind, the present article distinguishes between chronic tinnitus symptomatology with or without hearing loss—and strongly advocates for an integrated understanding of the symptomatology within a holistic psychological frame of reference. After a brief introduction to the principles of psychosomatic medicine and psychotherapy, the article discusses psychological case conceptualization using a vulnerability–stress–coping (VSC) model as an example, outlines clinical aspects and diagnostics of chronic tinnitus symptomatology, and concludes with a conceptualization of chronic tinnitus-related distress as a function of person-centered VSC interactions.

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