

JULY 2021 | @HEARINGASSESSMENTCENTER

CICADAS & TINNITUS

Newsletter by Hearing Assessment Center



A few weeks ago, we all noticed the swarms of large cicadas, with striking red eyes, flying around singing their loud chorus of noise. But did you know that they may play a possible role in helping tinnitus?



What are Cicadas?

Every 17 years cicadas emerge above ground as full grown adult insects. The first two weeks of their emergence is when you hear the loudest of their buzzing or mating calls. Thankfully we are past this stage! The female cicadas lay their eggs on twigs of trees and after 6-8 weeks the eggs hatch and fall to the ground. For the next 17 years, these insects will burrow underground and attach to tree roots.



Once they mature into their adult cicada form, these groups of insects, or broods of cicadas will emerge again. After mating and laying their eggs, both male and female adult cicadas die about 5 weeks aboveground.

Male cicadas sound similar to a buzzing noise created by fast vibrations on their abdomen. Female cicadas sound similar to a click noise created by their wings. Their chorus of sound can reach 100 dB loud; that's as loud as a motorcycle. But how do these insects relate to ears and hearing?

Tinnitus

First, let's discuss, what is tinnitus? Tinnitus can be defined as a sound, within someone's head, that occurs in the absence of sound. One in 10 adults experience tinnitus and only 50% of people with tinnitus discuss their experience with their healthcare provider. Tinnitus can impact quality of life, sleep, mental health and other parts of daily life. Tinnitus is most common in those who have excessive high-level noise exposure.



Many patients describe the sound of their tinnitus as ringing, buzzing, clicking, hissing, whistling, crickets or, like the sound of cicadas. The cicada season is over and fortunately, their sound has left with them. Unlike cicadas leaving, the population living with tinnitus experience a similar noise daily. Although there is currently no cure for tinnitus, the sound of cicadas are actively being studied to alleviate the effects of tinnitus. Research shows that using cicada sounds, as a masking sound, has achieved encouraging results and could have practical value in the future. The purpose of cicadas is unknown but who knows, they may just play a role in helping people with tinnitus someday!