

Stress, Ear Fullness & Hearing Your Heartbeat

A calm guide to what may be happening - and when to seek help



Why stress can affect the feeling

Stress activates the body's alert system. A faster heartbeat, tense jaw or neck muscles, shallow breathing and increased attention to body sensations can make pressure, ringing or pulsing feel stronger.

Stress can worsen symptoms, but it should not automatically be assumed to be the cause.

Other possible explanations

Earwax, infection, Eustachian tube dysfunction, allergies or a recent cold can cause fullness or muffled hearing. Jaw clenching or TMD can cause pain around the ear and temple.

A sound in time with the pulse is called pulsatile tinnitus and needs medical assessment.

Gentle things to try now

- Unclench your jaw: keep your teeth slightly apart and let your tongue rest gently.
- Breathe slowly: in for 4, out for 6, for one or two minutes.
- Use quiet background sound rather than complete silence.
- Note when it happens, which ear, and whether it matches your pulse.
- Avoid putting cotton buds or objects into the ear.

Arrange a GP or hearing check if

- Fullness, tinnitus or hearing changes keep returning, are getting worse, or affect sleep and daily life.
- You have pain, discharge, dizziness, or reduced hearing.
- The pulsing matches your heartbeat: NHS guidance says to request an urgent GP appointment.

Get emergency help now

Call 999 or go to A&E if tinnitus follows a head injury, or comes with sudden hearing loss, facial weakness or a severe spinning sensation. Also seek emergency help for chest pain, severe breathlessness, fainting, or new stroke-like symptoms.

A useful symptom note for your appointment

Write down: when it began; one or both ears; constant or intermittent; pressure, pain or hearing change; whether the sound exactly follows your pulse; recent cold, allergy, medication change or loud noise; and whether jaw movement changes it. This can help a clinician decide what examination or hearing tests are needed.

Space to Breathe Therapy | Support Hub information resource

Information only - not a diagnosis or a substitute for medical care. Sources checked August 2026: NHS Tinnitus; NHS Temporomandibular Disorder; Chelsea and Westminster Hospital ETD guidance.