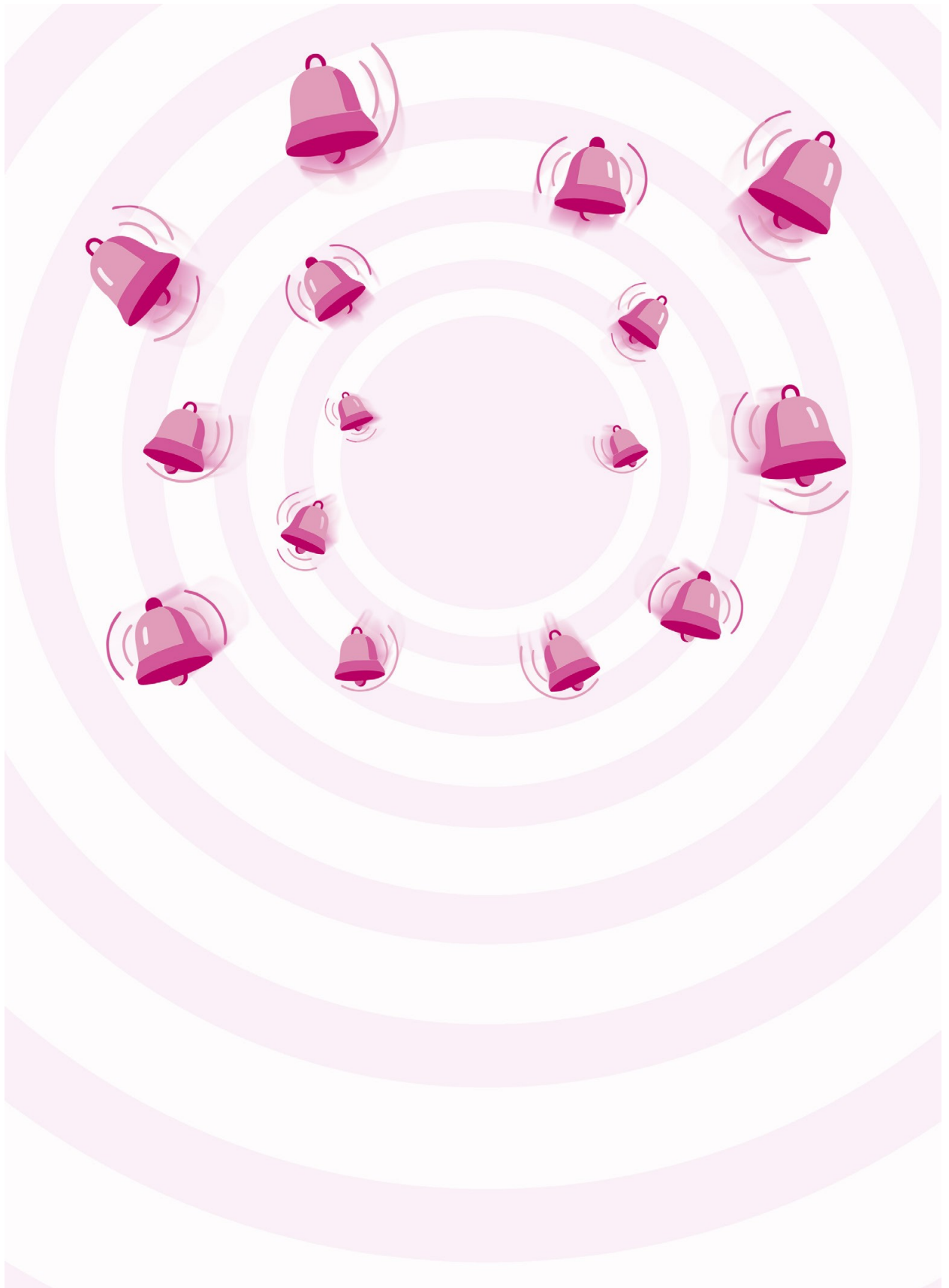


Magazines   Prima - UK Magazine   30 July 2025   'i woke up with a high-pitched ringing in my ears'

## **'i woke up with a high-pitched ringing in my ears'**

6 MIN READ

Jo Morey, 45, was devastated to be diagnosed with tinnitus. Here, she explains how she has come to terms with the condition and why she's passionately determined to speak out about it...





I'm always mishearing things. It's a bit of a family joke. I miss snippets of conversations or mix up words, confuse friends talking about "snoring" with our friend "Tori", or "aerosol" with "Anusol" (don't ask). And there was the time in a hotel in Mallorca when I went searching for the amazing "pool", though my two sons, who are now 10 and 12, had actually been telling me about the incredible "food" in the restaurant.

It was 15 years ago, when I was 30, that the tinnitus began. My husband, Will, and I had recently returned from two years travelling around the world. It was stressful, getting back into life in the UK, starting a new business and finding a house. After years of trying to get pregnant, I suffered a miscarriage. This was devastating, of course, but with all the other things going on and not knowing where to go for support, I don't think I processed it properly. A few weeks later, Will and I went out to a nightclub in Brighton with close friends. We had an amazing night dancing next to the massive sound system, drinking and celebrating being back together. I was able to switch off from the stresses of life and from the grief of the miscarriage.

## **HOW TINNITUS SOUNDS**

But the next morning, I woke up with a horrific, high-pitched ringing in my ears. It was so loud that I lay in bed, telling Will that I could barely hear his voice over the noise. I'd experienced something similar before, after music festivals and gigs, but nowhere near so extreme. We reassured ourselves it would disappear along with the hangover.

That night, I was hardly able to sleep, trying to ignore the sound. When I woke up the next morning, the ringing was still there, louder and now with horrendous intermittent whirring, rattling and pulsing, too. That was when I started to really worry. What if it never went away? What if it got worse? I couldn't focus on work, setting up my literary gift business, or watch TV. Even with the volume turned up to nearly maximum, I couldn't make out what was being said.

I was referred to my local hospital, where an audiologist looked inside my ears and explained that he had no real solution. There's no cure for tinnitus – in fact, specialists aren't sure exactly what causes it. They think it results from some kind of change in the body, either mental or physical, and isn't necessarily related to hearing at all. They asked if I'd been particularly stressed and, of course, I had. I was told I would have to live with the noise – one of the one in seven adults in the UK who live with persistent tinnitus.



Jo with her husband, Will, and two sons

| *'ONE IN SEVEN UK ADULTS LIVE WITH PERSISTENT TINNITUS'*



Eventually, I saw an ear, nose and throat specialist, who sent me for an extensive, specialist hearing test. I was told that not only do I have tinnitus, but also hearing loss at the highest pitches, which means it's hard for me to hear certain voices, parts of words and some vowel sounds. I can also no longer hear most birdsong or high-pitched alarms. Tinnitus is more common in people who have hearing loss, so this made sense. I was told I'd need to wear hearing aids in both ears. I couldn't believe my body was failing me so young. It felt like I'd aged three decades overnight.

## **WHEN I STARTED WEARING AIDS**

I felt anxious about my new reality of wearing aids, but on the way home I noticed that I could hear the presenter on the car radio more clearly than I had in years. The hearing aids took some adjusting to, of course. I had to get over my vanity and get comfortable with the look of them behind my ears. But I'm glad I started with them early. Experts say that the older you are, the harder it is to adapt to wearing them. And research shows that hearing loss deteriorates faster if you don't wear hearing aids. Still, over the 15 years I've worn them, my hearing has become significantly worse.

I'm passionate about removing the stigma around hearing loss and wearing aids. I've been lucky enough to be able to afford private hearing aids – when I started wearing them, the NHS ones were very clunky, although they are getting better. I often wear my aids proudly with my hair up. However, while glasses are now bright and bold, coming in all sorts of amazing shapes and colours, hearing aids are still

mostly made to blend in and disappear. I have been able to choose a blonde shade to match my hair. And there are some new jewellery brands, such as Auzi and Deafmetal, that attach to and celebrate hearing aids.

Big events are still hard. Crowded rooms, especially restaurants and bars, can be a nightmare. The acoustics in these places tend to be terrible.

It's difficult to follow conversations and I know that I miss things, especially when I'm in a group. It's embarrassing and exhausting – there are only so many times you can apologise and ask someone to repeat themselves. But I'm not afraid to ask for music to be turned down in cafes, or to be sat at a quieter table in the corner.

## **WHY I'M TALKING ABOUT TINNITUS**

Later this month, I'm going to a big literary festival – a chance to connect with other authors. I'm already planning how I will navigate it – who I will talk to and how. It helps when I explain to people that I struggle to hear. Everyone has been compassionate and accommodating. I often pick out people with lower voices who I'm able to hear. It may seem ridiculous, but I avoid people who speak quietly, as I know it will be awkward, for them and for me.

My husband helps me in group settings. He knows when I haven't heard something, have misunderstood or I'm confused. He will fill in the blanks and throw me a line of conversation. Some of my relationships

have been affected by my hearing loss, and things would be so much harder without my husband and patient and kind friends.

My debut novel, *The Night Lagoon*, was published this July. It's about a British woman trapped in a coercive relationship 5,000 miles from home in a Central American jungle. She also has tinnitus and a hearing impairment. Readers can experience the world from the point of view of someone like me. Publicising the novel has meant that I have been talking about my hearing loss more widely. I hope that this will help to break down some of the stigma and maybe encourage people to get their hearing checked and try hearing aids if they need them. The technology now is incredible and can really help lessen the sound of tinnitus while amplifying everything else.





Jo's hearing aids match her hair colour

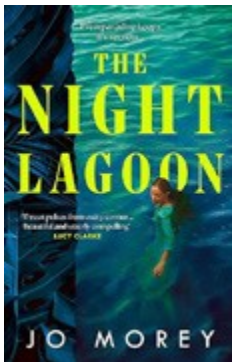
*'I'M NOT AFRAID TO ASK FOR MUSIC TO BE TURNED DOWN'*

## **HOW I'VE LEARNED TO COPE**

I still experience the tinnitus every minute of every day. But I've learned to relax into accepting it. I know that it's worse when I'm tired, stressed or hungover, so I try not to get into those states. Meditation and yoga

help, as does avoiding caffeine (but I do still love my coffee). In bed at night, I listen to gentle podcasts to distract me from the sounds.

I've come to love my aids because they help me get on with my life. I did once put them through the washing machine on a full cycle, but they survived and worked perfectly. They're tough and strong, like I have learned to be. I can't change my hearing, so I've found a way to be at peace with it.'



*The Night Lagoon (HarperCollins) by Jo Morey is out now*

### ***Tinnitus: what can help***

Dr Gladys Sanda is an audiologist and tinnitus specialist who developed the condition in 2020. 'One of the most powerful things I've learned is not to force myself to try to ignore it – the more we try to resist tinnitus, the more attention our brain gives it,' she says. 'If it flares up, I take it as a sign that I need to pause, breathe and reset, and to show myself some compassion.' This is what helps Dr Sanda...



Illustration Getty Photography Kirill Kozlov Photography, Samara Louise Photography

- **SOUND THERAPY** Play a sound that you like quietly in the background when you're working or resting. Try ocean waves, gentle rainfall or nature sounds, which are all types of 'pink noise'. You can also try the ReSound Tinnitus Relief app.
- **MINDFULNESS** The 54321 technique can help distract you from the noise in your ears. Look for five things you can see, four you can hear, three you can touch, two you can smell and, finally, one you can taste.
- **COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT) TECHNIQUES**  
These can change your relationship with tinnitus, removing fear and allowing acceptance to take its place. You can find more information in

Dr Sanda's free masterclass – [bit.ly/prima-tinnitus](https://bit.ly/prima-tinnitus). The Oto app uses mindfulness, relaxation and CBT to manage tinnitus. It's free to download or costs £107.99 for a 90-day Tinnitus Tune Out package ([joinoto.com](https://joinoto.com)). For more information from Tinnitus UK, visit [tinnitus.org.uk](https://tinnitus.org.uk).

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##### I want you to know what's in my knickers

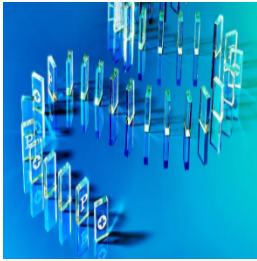
Dashing to the toilet, I winced as a burning sensation shot between my legs. It was April 2022, and I'd been having issues down below for a while. A history of heavy bleeding, fibroids and polyps had



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##### 'approaching menopause has definitely given me motivation'

TV doctor Zoe Williams wants to help more women understand the changes menopause can bring, and make them feel empowered to face them with confidence



WOMEN'S HEALTH - UK

## The perimenopause playbook

Three decades since a Canadian endocrinologist popularised a word for the transitional period between the onset of symptoms and your final period, the term has infiltrated the menopause conversation. But the facts remain as foggy as a frontal lobe deprived of oestrogen. As Perimenopause Awareness Month collides with the return to school, consider this a lesson in how to navigate this life stage

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