Tinnitus is the perception of sound in the ears or in the head when no external sound is present. The condition affects 44 million Americans, and many find that dealing with it is difficult at best. However, only 10-20 percent of people with tinnitus seek help for the condition, according to Johnson Audiology’s Dr. Guthrie.

“Patients can describe tinnitus as ringing, roaring, humming, buzzing or even chirping,” she explained. “The incidence of tinnitus increases to 30 percent in those over age 65, and one out of 100 patients reports their condition as debilitating. Unfortunately, many people are told by physicians that they have to learn to live with tinnitus,” she added.

“Although there is no cure, there are ways to treat and manage it so that we can reduce how often the patient hears it and how loud it is perceived. If medical professionals are not comfortable treating tinnitus in their patients, they need to know where to refer them,” she said.

Hearing loss, specifically presbycusis (age-related hearing loss) or noise-induced hearing loss, is the most common cause of tinnitus. But there are other medical conditions that can have tinnitus as a symptom. These common medical conditions include but are not limited to diabetes, hypertension, TMD, tumors, head trauma, thyroid conditions and multiple sclerosis.

Dr. Guthrie noted that if any signs of medical or psychiatric conditions that need attention are seen while treating a patient for tinnitus, Johnson’s audiologists will make the proper referrals.

“Referrals to psychiatrists are necessary when tinnitus patients are reporting severe depression, anxiety or uncontrolled or extreme stress,” she explained. “If a patient reports tinnitus at Johnson Audiology, the staff obtains a detailed case history, then performs a diagnostic hearing evaluation. The practice utilizes tinnitus-specific testing and questionnaires to determine the course of treatment, and offers many FDA-approved options. The treatment plans are tailored to the individual’s needs and lifestyle.

“The goal of any tinnitus treatment is habituation, or learning to ignore the tinnitus without any conscious effort. It can also be viewed as adapting to the sound.” Dr. Guthrie said. “It decreases the negative reaction to the tinnitus, and we do this largely through counseling and various forms of acoustic stimulation.”

Dr. Guthrie is certified through the Tinnitus Practitioners Association. All the audiologists at Johnson Audiology continue to research and provide the latest treatment options for tinnitus.

“Treating tinnitus is challenging, but I enjoy helping patients find relief from such a debilitating condition,” said Dr. Guthrie.

Johnson Audiology is located at 1618 Gunbarrel Road, Suite 102. The practice provides diagnostic hearing evaluations and consultations, hearing aid adjustments and repairs to patients age 10 and up. For more information about services or to schedule a consultation with Dr. Guthrie about tinnitus, call 423-933-3623 or visit johnsonaudiology.com.