

PARENTING WITH LISA SALMON



SHOULD I GET A DOG FOR KIDS?

The Dogs Trust advises on what to consider before getting a family dog

“MY children are desperate for a dog. They’ve promised they’ll look after it and walk it, but I know I’ll end up doing it and just haven’t got the time. It would be nice to have a dog though - what advice can you give?”

Dogs Trust head of education Hollie Sevenoaks says: “Dog ownership has so many benefits, but making the decision to get a family dog shouldn’t be taken lightly as there are many things to consider.

“Firstly, this should be a whole family decision as everyone has a part to play in making it a successful relationship. You should consider time, finances and the commitment needed to look after a dog for the average lifespan of 10-15 years. You should also research the breed and size of dog and where you want to get your dog from, to ensure you’re buying responsibly.

“Do you have enough room for a big dog, or would a smaller dog suit you better? Either way dogs need a lot of care and attention, consisting of walking at least twice a day, playtime and feeding time.

“It’s also really important that your family attends positive training classes to ensure your dog is sociable and well-behaved.

“The cost of a dog varies depending on how much you pamper your pooch, but the average cost of owning a dog for a year is £1,300; this includes all the essentials such as veterinary care, food, insurance, new toys and bedding.

“Although it’s important to realise dogs are a huge commitment for the whole family, there are plenty of positives to having a family pet. Studies have shown that stroking your dog can lower your blood pressure and make you feel calmer. Another positive is teaching your children responsibility and commitment, which is always a good thing.

“So as a general rule, if you’ve considered all of these factors before making your decision, you’re already on to a winner.”



WALKIES!: A family dog is great fun but there are lots of things to consider

RING THE CHANGES TO FIGHT TINNITUS

HEALTH

With Dr Zak Uddin



When an illness is not visible and indeed cannot be appreciated by persons other than the sufferer, understanding and awareness of the condition is sometimes limited.

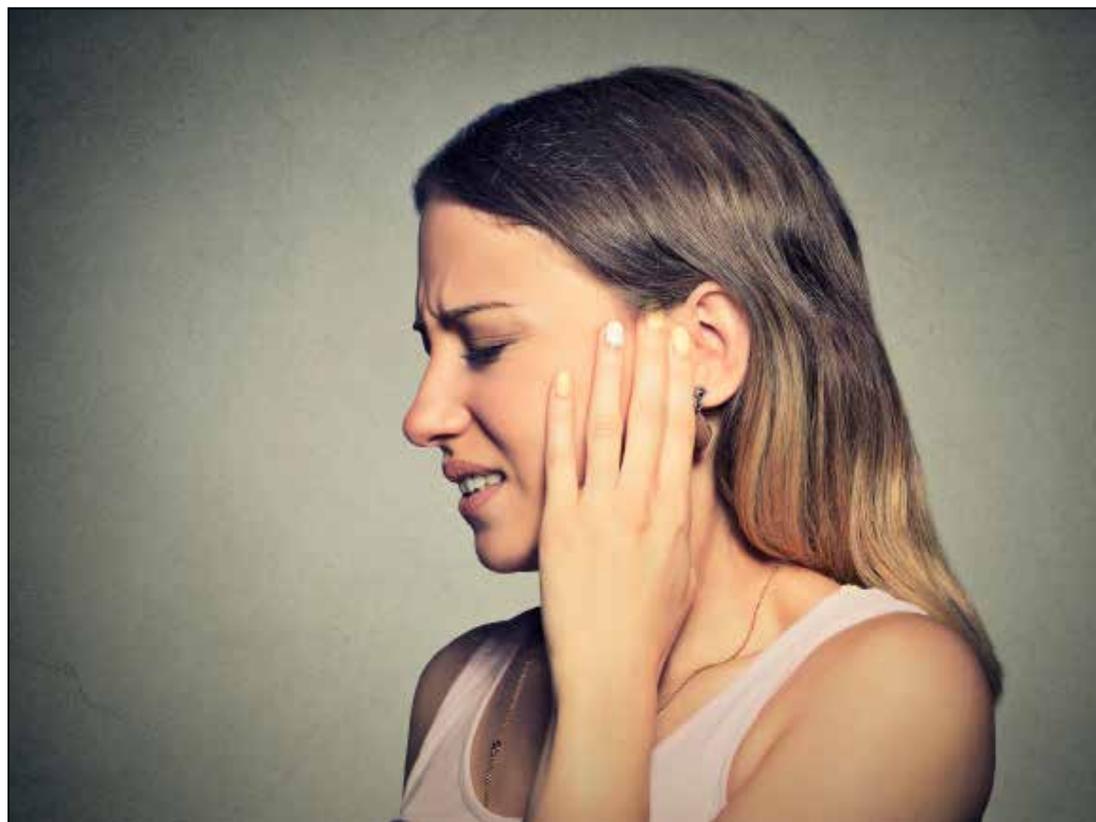
The Tea for Tinnitus week, running from February 5 to 11, aims to redress this and raise the profile of a surprisingly common issue.

Tinnitus is described as the sensation of sound or noise which only the person affected can hear. Although typically described as a ringing, it can take on many forms including buzzing and whooshing, and a few perceive music being played, although this is much less common.

Tinnitus can strike at any age, with an estimated 30 per cent of people, including children, suffering the symptoms at some point. Thankfully, most episodes are short lived, however in the UK there are six million people with the condition long term, and ten per cent of these will be affected severely.

There are many causes of tinnitus, from a simple build-up of wax in the ears, ear infection itself through to hearing loss, unfortunately a natural part of ageing. Loud music concerts and working with heavy machinery also put people at risk. Some drugs including aspirin, antidepressants and certain antibiotics may also trigger an attack. However, in a third of cases no cause is found and examination of the ears is completely normal.

One of the theories behind tinnitus is that it is not a fault



DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION: Tinnitus can be frightening and disabling for the sufferer and in extreme cases, some people affected by it have killed themselves

with the ear itself, but rather the brain, which is unable to filter out noises it would normally discard. Thus episodes sometimes correspond to periods of increased stress in a person’s life.

Despite tinnitus rarely being a sign of underlying illness or disease, nevertheless it can be very frightening and indeed disabling, especially if persistent, and can drive one to distraction, with some sufferers even taking their own lives as a result.

The first thing to do would be to see your routine GP. Simple causes such as wax can be easily

sorted and if hearing loss is identified, being referred to an audiologist would be the next step. Some individuals report that their symptoms are made worse by caffeine, alcohol and lack of sleep and addressing these simple measures can often yield improvement.

There are now dedicated clinics which have much to offer, from understanding tinnitus to providing practical solutions for living with a condition which as yet has no cure. Symptoms are often worse in the quiet, so sound boxes have been developed, which have soothing background noises such as waves lapping the shore

or leaves rustling, to distract from the unpleasant ringing sensations.

Counselling to help better understand the condition has shown to help and Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) involves a combination of sound therapy and intensive counselling, with the goal of educating the brain to filter out unwanted noises.

In terms of minimising your risk of tinnitus, it is important to respect your hearing, avoid prolonged exposure to loud noises, and always wear appropriate ear protection if advised.

How can I explain aunt’s death to my child?

Q: My Aunt Jessica died recently and unexpectedly. She was only 58. I am struggling to find the words to tell my four-year-old daughter, whom she was very close to – Shauneen

A: I am very sorry for your loss. Bereavement can be even harder if a death was unexpected or the person not very old. However, it has been shown that young children can understand the concept of death, if it is explained to them in a way that is kind but does not leave any doubt in their mind. I am sure you are suffering too, but you need to let your daughter know that she won’t be

able to see Aunt Jessica anymore. It is up to your personal beliefs as to the place you tell your daughter Aunt Jessica has gone to, be that heaven or some other place that provides personal comfort to you.

Q: I’m worried that my 16-year-old son may be experimenting with recreational drugs. We used to have a good relationship but now I can hardly talk to him without it ending in an argument - Henrietta

A: Teenage years can certainly be a difficult time, both for the individual and indeed parents.

Although it may be difficult, it is important to pick your moment and try and sit down with him. Point out that you are worried about the breakdown in relationship; he may not be aware of how much this is hurting you. His behaviour may be due to something other than drugs, for example bullying, the pressure of school, or even a romantic relationship issue. However, if you feel confident and are able to, be upfront and voice your concerns about the drug issue. If there is such a problem, this will be an opportunity for him to open up and you can seek help together.

If you have a question for Dr Zak, please email: askdoctorzak@gmail.com
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Dr Uddin’s advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.