



TINNITUS

A GUIDE

THE BIRMINGHAM & DISTRICT TINNITUS GROUP IS SUPPORTED BY

(T)
British Tinnitus
Association



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Introduction

Please note: we advise you consult your doctor on any health matter, the contents in this guide are to be considered as complementary to medical advice!

This is the fifth edition of the Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group's Tinnitus – A Guide

It is still a reflection on medical science that things have moved slowly for tinnitus. Although we now have a better understanding of the causes of tinnitus, a cure still seems a long way off.

Thus, the need for a tinnitus support group is just as great as it was when it was founded

It is a tribute to Eric Trowsdale, who died 27th August 2012 and put so much of himself into the creation and running of B&DTG that the group continues to flourish and make a difference to those who experience tinnitus. The paintings in this guide are copies of watercolours painted by Eric. The group continues largely thanks to the support of Irwin Mitchell (Solicitors) and the stalwarts of the Committee!

If you have access to the Internet, there are many websites devoted to tinnitus; we recommend the following as useful starting points:

Our own: www.tinnitusbham.org.uk

British Tinnitus Association (BTA): www.tinnitus.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss (RNID): www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Take on Tinnitus: www.takeontinnitus.co.uk

BID: www.bid.org.uk

American Tinnitus Association: www.ata.org

Thanks to Irwin Mitchell (Solicitors) for their support in publishing this guide.

What is tinnitus?

Tinnitus (from the [Latin](#) word *tinnītus* meaning "[ringing](#)") is the perception of sound within the human ear or head in the absence of corresponding external sound.

That's it, in its simplest form! But if you experience tinnitus, it's more complicated than that!

People with tinnitus can experience different types of sound. Most people describe it as a ringing sound but other sounds may include:

- buzzing
- humming
- whistling
- music

Sometimes, the noise associated with tinnitus beats in time with a person's pulse. This is known as pulsatile tinnitus.

Tinnitus is often worse at quiet times, such as when you are trying to get to sleep. This is because there is less background noise to distract you from the sounds of tinnitus. The sound may also be more noticeable when you are tired. Tinnitus is a symptom rather than a condition itself. The sounds are usually only heard by the person who has tinnitus, although in a few rare cases, they can also be heard by other people.

Temporary tinnitus can be caused by a cold, a blow to the head, or prolonged exposure to a loud noise, such as a music concert.

Permanent tinnitus can be caused by age-related hearing loss, again prolonged exposure to loud noise (factories, music concerts etc.) certain medication, head injuries, underlying medical conditions and stress.

So, you think you have tinnitus!

Firstly, go to your GP who will make an initial diagnosis and if necessary refer you to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) consultant or direct to an Audiology Clinic.

This guide can only point you in the right direction, and give you some advice on how to cope and manage your tinnitus. However, the B&DTG have been offering support and advice since 1981, so let us be one of your guides through your journey to cope with this debilitating condition.

You are not alone! The B&DTG are able to offer both group support sessions and telephone support - for details please see the back cover.

Many tinnitus patients find it helpful and comforting to attend support sessions where they can meet with fellow sufferers who can advise on how they cope. At those times when the tinnitus is unbearable, it is good to talk to someone who cares and understands - even on the phone. So please come to our meetings and phone our "Friendly Ears" when things get bad!

When you first notice your tinnitus there are many questions you need answering - from your doctor, your consultant, your audiologist etc. Here are some of the most FAQ's!

What causes it?

Please see above.

Does syringing or microsuction cause it?

Syringing or microsuction, when carried out properly, can clear the ears of excess wax and improve hearing thus making your tinnitus less noticeable.

Will it (tinnitus) make me go deaf?

The simple answer is no! Not everyone with tinnitus has hearing loss and not everyone who has hearing loss has tinnitus! However, if there is some loss of hearing, using hearing aids will be the first means of helping you cope with your tinnitus.

Will it get worse?

Again, the simple answer is NO, BUT, like many conditions, if you are tired, run down or under stress it may appear worse. Rest assured, as soon as you pick up again the tinnitus will appear less.

Will flying make it worse?

The short answer is no. Flying can affect the ears of everyone to a degree, but is normally only temporary. The British Tinnitus Association (BTA) produces a helpful leaflet on flying if you need more information. (www.tinnitus.org.uk/flying-and-the-ear)

Does diet affect tinnitus?

People can be affected by diet in many ways, but there appears to be no direct link with tinnitus. Some people may feel better if they avoid caffeine and/or alcohol but others may find they help! It goes without saying that a sensible, balanced diet is recommended and this in itself will improve your well-being.

Why do I need a scan?

Your ENT Consultant may ask for a scan to eliminate any physical abnormalities. It is very rare that there is a serious underlying condition and even if there is, it is most likely to be treatable.

Ginkgo Biloba, Hopi Candles, ear cleaners and many more, all claim to cure or help tinnitus. Is there any truth in these claims?

The B&DTG President, Dr W Ewart Davies undertook some large-scale research on ginkgo biloba at Birmingham University. The research showed that that GK is NOT a cure for tinnitus, in fact Dr Davies concluded that any perceived benefit was a non-specific improvement in the subjects' well-being.

Hopi candles are NOT recommended by the BTA's Professional Advisors, indeed extreme caution is advised when holding a lighted candle close to the hair!

Treating tinnitus

The treatment for tinnitus will depend on the underlying cause. For example, for tinnitus that is caused by a build-up of earwax, eardrops or removal by a health professional is recommended.

However, in many cases of tinnitus, there is no cure and treatment aims to manage the symptom on a daily basis.

How common is tinnitus?

Tinnitus is a common condition. Approximately 1 in 10 people in the UK have some awareness of tinnitus. However, only 1 in 200 people are severely affected by it.

People of all ages can have tinnitus, including young children, but it is more common in older people.

Outlook

Most people learn to live with tinnitus but it can have a significant effect on daily life. For example, it can affect concentration and cause [sleeping problems](#) and [depression](#).

There is currently no cure for long-term tinnitus. Therefore, the aim of treatments, such as sound therapy, relaxation therapy and [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) (CBT), is to help people manage their symptoms effectively.

Ear cleaners should also be avoided. The ear has its own natural cleaning process. If you consider you have excessive ear wax, seek medical advice, and if needed, have it removed by a health professional. **DO NOT USE COTTON WOOL BUDS IN THE EAR!**

The Internet is a wide source of information about many things, but if you "Google" tinnitus, you will be met with many (very costly) products and treatments which claim to cure/help tinnitus. We have yet to see one that has been medically proven to help! So, treat all such web-sites with caution and skepticism and visit the ones we recommend on page 2.

Is there a cure?

There is not a simple cure at this time. The good news is that there are many ways of coping with tinnitus and this guide will help you in hopefully your coping strategy.

There is also a considerable amount of research going on, and currently there are encouraging developments world-wide. There is little doubt that there will be a pharmaceutical "cure" at some stage, therefore it is a good idea to keep in touch with the BTA and/or your local support group so you can be kept up-to-date with developments.

If there is no "cure", how can I learn to cope with it?

There are many ways by which you can learn to cope. Here are a few suggestions:

- join your local tinnitus support group or the BTA, where you can receive support and be kept up-to-date with treatments research etc.,
- avoid silence as silence emphasises tinnitus. Try adding background noises /sounds. Open a window, switch on a fan or radio.
- avoid alcohol as an aid to sleep, if sleep proves difficult, try an under pillow-speaker

Relaxation is one of the most helpful forms of therapy. Later on in this guide we will take you through some exercises which have been written especially for tinnitus sufferers. We have recorded these exercises and a CD is available where rather than reading the exercise a voice takes you through them - please see inside back cover for details and purchase.

- there are many "sound therapy" CD's, noise generators available, again please see inside back cover for details and purchases.
- All our leaflets are available in the spoken word on CD - please see inside back cover

Is it possible to get used to it? Oh YES!, the vast majority habituate (get used to), often without any professional help. With a positive outlook - you're more than half-way there!



RELAXATION AND YOU

This course is also available on CD which you can purchase from the BTA

Lesson One

Rather than start with long-winded explanations as to why we should relax, let us start with a simple exercise and we can explore the whys and wherefores later, *So.... for a quiet moment....*

Bear in mind that there is only one rule in relaxation and that is:

find the time!

Reading books, talking about it, resolving to do it are all quite empty efforts.....*unless you do actually do set the time aside to relax.*

The aim of this exercise is to let go as much as you can in the time available. So, *find two minutes-just two minutes* - preferably three times a day, when you can sit down in a comfortable chair - one with a high back would be ideal. Get your body nicely settled into it, resting your head on the back of the chair, with your arms and hands where they are comfortable on the arms of the chair or on your lap. Have your feet on the floor and slightly apart. Now, tell your muscles to relax, to let go, to become soft and at ease.

You can work through your body systematically, starting at the top of your head, and working down the body, directing your attention to the forehead, eyes, cheeks, lips, jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers and thumbs, then the back, chest, abdomen, legs, feet and toes. You could, if you prefer, reverse the process and start at the toes and work *up* through the body, whatever you find suits you. But do concentrate on those parts of the body where you may have unnecessary tension, whether it be the jaw, shoulders, neck and abdomen.

You may have been taught (in a class or on Digital Media) to tighten up groups of muscles before relaxing them, but this is a different and much lengthier exercise and you may not always have the time to do it. So just tell your muscles to *let go*.

It is important to spend no longer than two minutes doing this exercise, and when it is complete, you can get up and carry on your normal routine. You may, if you wish, continue to sit for a moment or two, enjoying being still and at ease. Do not concern yourself if you do not achieve much at first - like any other skill, relaxation has to be learned gradually, a step at a time. Do not worry either if

you forget to practice, or if circumstances prevent you from doing so. Concentrate on the day and what you can do that day.

Above all, be gentle with yourself and remember - anything worth acquiring was not gained overnight.

Now let us consider some of those whys and wherefores. The benefits of relaxation will begin straightaway, although you may not be aware of them for a few months. Sometimes, it is someone else who notices them first! Just as someone who gives up smoking does not notice the improvement in breathing or general health for months or even years, the benefits of not smoking will actually start from the very first day. So it is with relaxation - there is an accumulative effect.

There is no wrong way in which to relax. If you want to play music, burn incense, whatever helps you, then do what is right for you. Try different techniques and exercises, then work out your own preferences, to make up your own “programme”. Think of it like the pick & mix sweet counter, where you can pick and choose what you like, but you cannot know what you do or do not like, until you have tried them all.

When we talk of relaxation, we do not mean watching the television, or reading, or gardening etc. These have their place and help you feel better in yourself. What we are aiming to learn is deep relaxation. Here, you are aiming to do absolutely nothing. Deep relaxation will help you to enjoy your other leisure activities all the more. Then after each session of deep relaxing, you take with you the benefits of having relaxed and this affects the way you respond to all the situations in your everyday life.

Relaxation is not something to be kept in a separate compartment of your life, like supporting your favorite football team. Relaxation is to be used ALL THE TIME, no matter where you are, or who you are with or what you are doing. But to practice and learn this skill, time must be set aside. So give yourself this time and we will go more deeply into the subject of relaxation in the next lesson

Lesson Two

So now let us continue with the practice of relaxation at home. Try to keep up the exercise of letting go physically just for two minutes. This can bring great benefits so do try to find the time (after all it is only two minutes) to do it as often as possible:

When you sit down in your favourite armchair with a cup of tea

Just as you get into the car but before setting out on your journey

At the traffic lights

On the bus or when you get into bed

Look for your own particular times to suit your way of life

Another way of increasing relaxation in the body is by paying particular attention to the breathing. The breathing is something that we tend to take very much for granted (unless you are an opera singer or diving for pearls in the South Pacific). So from time to time, concentrate on your breath - just watch it enter the body and leave the body. Observe the gentle rhythm that comes with breathing easily and effortlessly.

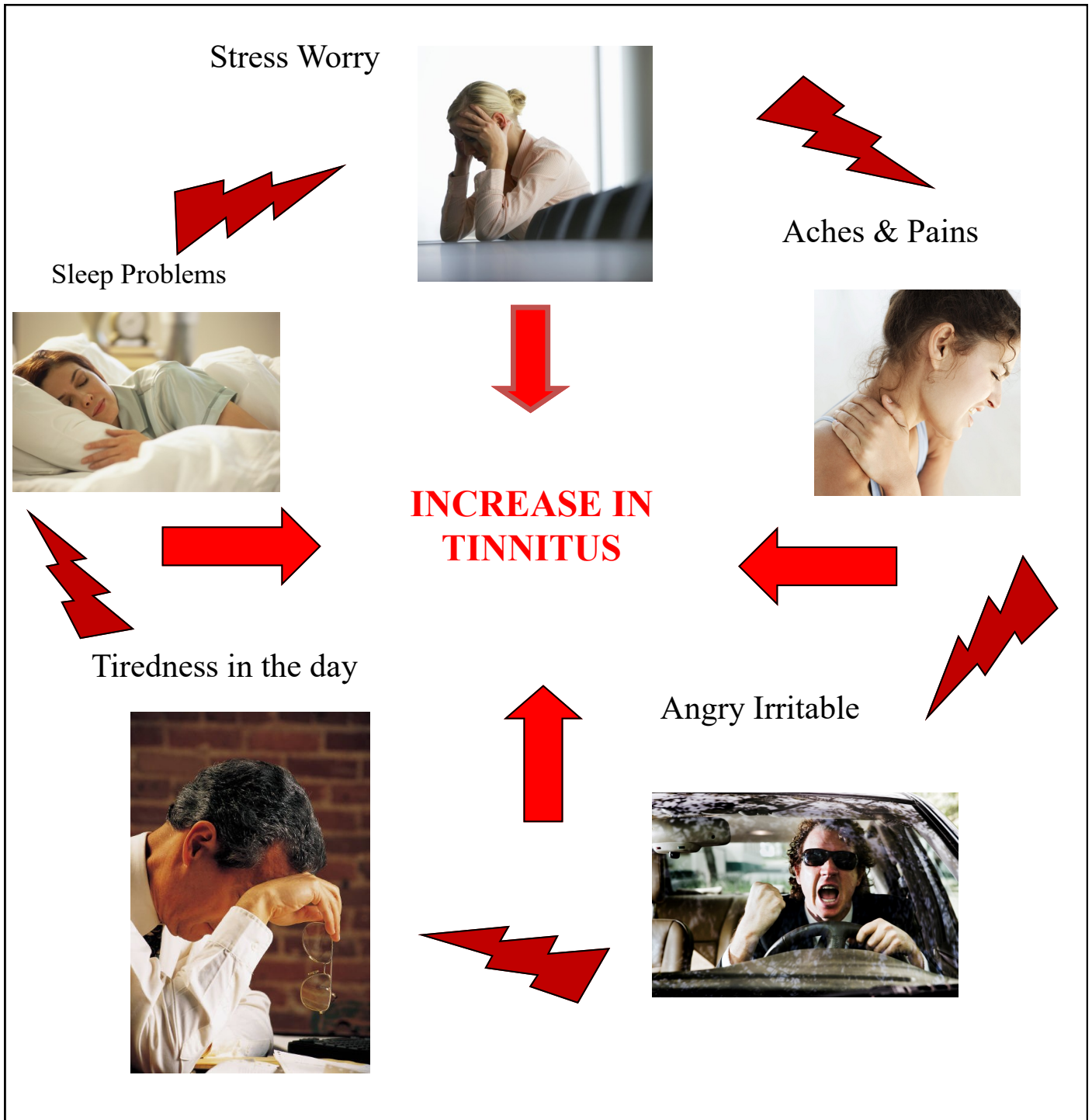
Now try to slow the breath down by taking 3 or 4 slow even breaths in and out through the nose. Try to make the IN breath take the same amount of time as the out breath. As you breathe out let go of tension particularly in the jaw, neck, shoulders and abdomen. This has a calming effect and can be combined with other rhythms, like that of walking ... so, for example, you can breathe in for 3 steps and out for 3 steps.

Another exercise to do whilst sitting or standing still is to breathe in and out through the nose and then just stay quietly without breathing in again, for a few seconds, watching the space between that breath and the next. Let no strain enter the body, just breathe in again when you feel the need. You are looking for control and the slowing down of the breath for a couple of minutes, and this can be an aid to greater concentration.

The beauty and strength of the breathing exercises are that you can do them anywhere and at any time, standing, walking, sitting or lying down. They can be extended and control of the abdominal muscles can be introduced and combined with breath control. You will find more breathing exercises in books on Stress Managements, Relaxation, Yoga etc. so take an interest in learning to control your breath. Practise when you feel good, don't wait until you feel stressed, so that at those times you will, almost automatically, be able to restore calm and balance.

Have fun practising this exercise!





**The Vicious Circle of TENSION, TIREDNESS,
WORRY, ANGER & STRESS**

Many people find that their tinnitus increases when they are under stress; a vicious circle of tension, tiredness, irritability and worry can then build up, adding to the tinnitus, and then the tinnitus adding to the problems.

Lesson Three

To go more deeply into the practice of relaxation, more time has to be set aside. It is preferable (certainly at first) to try to practise every two or three days, but even once a week can bring benefits. Ideally, at least fifteen minutes should be spent on this exercise. You can learn to relax to the point where your body feels as though it is hardly a part of you and your mind feels relaxed and uncluttered.

So, to get the body to be able to reach this stage, you must first make it comfortable. Make sure that you are not going to be disturbed (phone disconnected, cat and dog outside and all teenagers locked in the garden shed!). Make sure too, that you are going to be warm, because the body does lose heat as it winds down. You should be totally supported (head, back and legs) so use the floor, a bed or couch, a good high-backed chair with footrest, whatever suits you best and treat yourself to this special time. If you wear glasses, remove them. If you find background noise helpful, play music or natural sounds that do not demand your attention.

Relax the muscles in each part of the body, working from head to toe or vice versa, paying particular attention to those areas where you know you may have tension. If you have been practising the two minute relax, you will be able to do this quite naturally. If any muscle groups do feel tense, then gently stretch them and let them move back quite easily into a comfortable position. If, when you relax, you feel any discomfort anywhere, then adjust your position and this will help you to relax even more deeply.

Close your eyes and spend a few moments watching the breath entering the body and then leaving it slightly warmer and moister. As you breathe out, tell yourself to let go. Do this a couple of times more, saying to yourself ... relax ... let go ... each time you breathe out.

In the same way that you watch the breath in and out, observe your thoughts. These will come - that is as it should be - but try not to become involved in them - just let them go. If you find your attention wandering to everyday things or if you are troubled by a problem, then very gently but quite firmly bring your concentration back into your relaxing, back into your breathing and let go a bit more as you exhale. Check that the body has not tightened up in response to these intrusive thoughts, and then let yourself drift once more.

Try not to judge how well you are relaxing - aim just to enjoy it. It is, after all, a state of doing absolutely nothing and being at peace. No effort is required on your part; if you let go, all tension will leave the body and the mind of its own accord.

You can, if you wish, use your imagination to visualise yourself in a place where you feel totally at ease, completely at peace with yourself and the world around you - maybe on a seashore, or beside a lake (particularly if you are playing one of the tapes with the sounds of waves lapping) in a garden, on a mountain.

When you have spent as much time as you wish on yourself, gently stretch the body (like a cat does) and in your own time and in your own way, become alert and active once more, feeling good.

There are many books and tapes which can aid you in your study - ask friends, neighbours, libraries, hospitals if you can beg or borrow them. Experiment, probe, keep your mind open and take the time to be kind to yourself.



Lesson Four

To take your relaxation with you, you need it to become a habit (a good one) - one that will come automatically to you in all circumstances.

Remember that relaxation is a technique that needs to have time set aside and to be practised regularly; it will not be achieved overnight, but, if we can take a relaxed attitude with us into our everyday routine, we can benefit even further.

So the next time you are sitting watching the television, or reading a book, or listening to the radio, look at yourself. Are your legs crossed, causing unnecessary strain? Are your shoulders raised, instead of being relaxed downwards? Is your jaw tight and forehead furrowed, perhaps in an effort to concentrate, or to hear and understand more clearly? When you are talking to someone, do you find one foot going up and down? You may observe this behaviour in someone else first, so develop an awareness of it in yourself. Or the next time you walk down the road, observe yourself. Are your shoulders hunched, in your haste to reach your destination? Are your teeth clenched or is your back bent?

The raised shoulders, the tight jaw, the furrowed forehead, the clenched teeth, the bent back in no way aid our ability to achieve what we desire - to sit comfortably or to walk easily. Indeed they are taking up precious energy, that we could well use in some other pursuit. If we can learn to use only those muscles that are necessary to sit or to walk, and to use only that amount of energy that is necessary to do whatever it is we are doing, the rest of the body can relax, and the energy that we conserve, we can use to enjoy ourselves just that little bit more.

So, while we are walking, we avoid rushing, just taking everything in our stride; and while we are sitting, we are using only those muscles that are necessary to sit. So, no matter where we are, or who we are with, or what we are doing, we need to expend only the energy and effort necessary to accomplish the task in hand. Indeed, because we are not so tired at the end of the day, sleep will come much more easily and naturally.

Look at yourself now, at this moment, and acquire the gentle habit of doing this many times during each day for the next few weeks - whether you are

sitting, standing, walking, waiting, talking. Do it twenty, thirty, forty times a day, it does not matter, so that you build up an automatic awareness of when and where you are unnecessarily tense. Use those waiting moments to your own benefit - whilst waiting for the kettle to boil, for someone to answer the telephone, for the bus or train to come, for a visitor to arrive, and so on. Instead of becoming frustrated at the delay, look at yourself, and ask yourself "Can I let my shoulders roll down a little bit? Can I smooth my forehead? Can I let my jaw relax so that my teeth are a little bit apart and my lips just softly touching?".

And take this practice with you wherever you are



Now for the Good News

When we realise we are in a vicious circle of tension, tiredness and worry, we can help ourselves by creating our own **GOOD** circle - one of relaxation - one which will break and dissolve the bad circle. Relaxation reduces our response to a symptom such as tinnitus. You can learn to relax by reading books, listening to our CD, and attending classes



Lesson Five

Do you still find yourself sometimes going round in circles? Despite all your efforts to calm down, to become involved in pleasurable activities, to stay cheerful, still you find yourself spiraling gloomily downwards. You may be familiar with the old vicious circle of feeling under the weather (maybe only a cold, perhaps something more debilitating) and, because the body is under physical strain, you feel "down". Because you feel down, everything else requires that much more effort to cope with, and this includes your tinnitus, which then seems louder. Or, maybe you are worrying about the family, a friend, work, money, a journey, anything at all. This takes up a lot of your mental energy, so you feel tired, yet the churning thoughts hinder you from sleeping well, so you face each day tired, which makes you more aware of your tinnitus, which adds to your original worry. And so it goes on, round and round in an endless circle of worry, tiredness and tinnitus.

If you can recognise that this is happening to you, then you have made the first important step towards preventing this circle turning faster and faster, sweeping you along with it. All you have to do is to break into the vicious harmful circle and then replace it with a good beneficial one. Here is one for you to try. It doesn't actually matter where you start, because, since it is a circle, you will come back to where you started.

- First relax the shoulders and jaw. Let them sag.
- Next take a few slow, even, quiet breaths.
- Then feel yourself taking back control and this will allow the thoughts to quieten a little.
- Then a feeling of calmness will follow, succeeded by an increased ability to cope with whatever it is that is making you tense.
- Now you can regain confidence in yourself, so that you can do whatever it is that you have to do.
- Because you now feel more sure of yourself, you can relax which means that your muscles soften a bit more, so you are at the start of the good circle once again, and you can repeat the circle of relaxing the muscles, slowing the breath, feeling quieter, calmer and more confident.

So, in a nutshell - relax the muscles - slow the breath - control and calmness follow - increased confidence helps you to relax more -and so on - and so on.

Find your own good circle, adapt it, use it; make it work for you.

And now just a few words about what happens to you, when you set time aside for yourself. During relaxation, changes take place and your physical, mental and emotional well-being are affected.

Physically, the muscles let go of tension so the toxins can be cleared from the blood stream. Breathing becomes more even. Blood pressure drops and the heart beats more regularly and slowly. Other organs, including the brain, slow down their activity.

Mentally, because brain activity is at a different level to when you are active, you actually decrease your response to any type of symptom, including tinnitus. Concentration is aided, and decision making is easier, because you are mentally refreshed.

Emotionally, you feel quieter, calmer and more confident, because it does not take so much effort to cope with things. You feel able to take life as it comes, without overreacting. After a period of relaxation, many people find that they can get things back into perspective, and the difficulties which they had perceived as huge, shrink back into their right proportions.

By learning to relax you are taking an active part in controlling your tinnitus. We know that people who are helping themselves with their symptoms (whatever they may be) do feel better and actually get better.

So relaxation may not reduce your tinnitus, but it can alter your response to it and it will help you deal with it much, much better.

Take these thoughts with you until you try the next lesson.

Remember, how you perceive your tinnitus has a bearing on how well you cope with it, Always try to refer to yourself as 'experiencing tinnitus' rather than 'suffering with tinnitus'

Those who say they are 'experiencing tinnitus' tend to live relatively normal lives, whereas those who describe themselves as a 'sufferer' tend to regard the noise as threatening and take longer to habituate (adjust to it)

Lesson Six

You have within you with most wonderful tool for helping you to create a feeling of wellbeing - and this is your **imagination**. We are already probably pretty good at imagining the worst that can happen - a downpour at the Summer Fete, accidents, redundancy, illness - a couple of sneezes and we are already imagining that we have a bout of 'flu that is going to lay us low for at least four days and that means that we are not going to be able to do such and such or see so and so and before we know it we have, in our mind, spent the whole week at home trying to rearrange our lives. And the next morning we wake up feeling as fit as a fiddle (where does that expression come from, I wonder?) See what I mean?

Well, we can use this same ability to present to ourselves the best possible scenario, we can talk ourselves up and the body will respond appropriately by releasing tension, and functioning without any undue strain.

So start by seeing yourself in a place where you feel utterly at ease, completely calm. It may be a favourite spot you have, or somewhere you have visited on holiday. It need not be a real place at all, but one you have made up within your own imagination. You want to try to make the picture as complete as possible, so pay attention in turn to the colours and shapes of the things around you, to the sounds around you, to the smells and tastes that are on the air, to the feel and textures of the things around you, beneath your feet, above your head, even the feel of the clothes upon your body. Maybe you are sitting by some water, and you can dip your hand in, sensing the coolness and freshness of it. Maybe you are by the seashore and can hear the waves and feel them gently lapping over your feet and then you can feel the sand between your toes. Maybe you are in a garden, or in the country and the colours and perfumes of the flowers and blossoms are overwhelming.



Work on this image over several sessions, so that it becomes clearer and more familiar each time, and indeed you can add more details as you get better at using your imagination. Link the things around you with feelings of calmness, strength, security, comfort, happiness, harmony and well being or whatever you need. And then, without any effort on your part, your body and mind will relax. You are going to have to practice but images come more easily and quickly with time, so that you can eventually transport yourself to this wonderful place in a split second and feel yourself relaxing immediately and enjoying all those beneficial feelings within you.

Then, be prepared to recreate the **feelings** that you experience in your own special place at those time during your daily routine, when you find yourself becoming unnecessarily tense, worried, angry, frustrated. Recall your special place to mind and the unhappy feelings will fade away. It really does work!

Over the past six lessons, you will have learned that no expensive equipment or special place is needed for you to practise relaxation. The abilities to relax are all within you. Be kind to yourself, be gentle with yourself, look after yourself and you will greatly benefit. So too, will those around you as they see the calm and strong person that you now are.



“There are several reasons why it makes good sense to learn to relax:

It can be an effective way of coping with stress
and the disorders it causes.

It can prevent or alleviate aches and pains caused by
inappropriate muscle tension.

It can help to avoid unnecessary fatigue and is useful in aiding recovery after
strenuous exercise.

It can raise the threshold of tolerance to pain.

It can enrich personal relationships because it is easier to get on with people
when you are relaxed and at ease.

It can improve physical skills. The ability to avoid unnecessary muscle tension
will improve performance whether you are a musician or a games' player and
relaxation can lower excessive anxiety before a
demanding event.

These claims are not wild ones based only on hopeful conjectures, they are all
supported by research evidence from a number of countries as well as by more
than forty years of my own professional experience.

From the introduction to

‘Stress and Relaxation’

written by Jane Madders

STRESS

Stress does not necessarily cause tinnitus, no more than tinnitus necessarily causes stress. Neither is stress out there waiting to attack us; stress arises from within. Stress stems from the interaction between what happens and our perception of what is happening.

That said, we all have stressors (the things that make us stressed) that disrupt the fine balance of the mind and body. Tinnitus is such a stressor. But it is how you perceive your tinnitus that has a bearing on how well you cope with it. To quote a leading ENT consultant: ‘Some patients regard themselves as “suffering” tinnitus, while others regard themselves as “experiencing” tinnitus. Those who say they “experience” it tend to lead relatively normal lives. Those who describe themselves as “suffering” from tinnitus tend to regard the noise as threatening and take longer to adjust.’

Therefore, how can one move from a point of ‘suffering’ to a point of coping? Fortunately, there are many routes to take and various ways are open to you.

To begin with, learning relaxation techniques is a good way to start coping. Many people benefit from attending Stress Management and Relaxation Courses at local Adult Education Centres while others have been helped by Complementary Therapists who teach relaxation, yoga and self-hypnosis. Self-hypnosis is particularly helpful as it enables the patient to change focus from their tinnitus to a place created by them through the use of visualisation. Similarly, meditation also provides something other than the tinnitus to focus on.

Stress, of course, can often lead to tension. Tension is the physical effects of stress and usually manifests itself in pain. This can be caused by a build-up of uric and lactic acid in the muscles. The best way of dealing with pain caused by tension is massage, which not only reduces pain but also has a calming effect on the mind.

In addition, relaxation CD’s/downloads can sometimes help reduce tension. There are a great many available and it is a matter of finding one that suits you.

It is estimated that one in ten of the adult population of the UK has tinnitus.

Every day 200 more people are diagnosed and with the increase in 'noise pollution' it would seem the problem can only get worse. But help is available through Complementary Therapy. Some therapies will, quite naturally, work better for some people than others and it is a matter of finding the one that works for you by trying them out. No harm can come to you by doing so for Complementary Therapy is gentle and safe.

The most important thing is to have a positive attitude towards your tinnitus. Don't 'suffer' tinnitus, try treating it as a friend who is with you all the time. Talk to it but remember always to use positive words. Every thought has a physical effect upon the body, so thinking negative thoughts will affect how you feel. This includes our 'self-talk', the words we say to ourselves. It is also important not to become isolated. If you live alone keep in touch with friends. Go out as often as you can. Have a massage or reflexology treatment. Spoil yourself. Maintain a relaxed attitude at all times. Don't allow yourself to be drawn into arguments. Say to yourself: 'Even if the worst happened I could live with it, so there is no point in worrying.' Have a good laugh. Laughter releases endorphins, the body's natural pain tranquilliser, into the blood stream. Remember that famous quotation from 'Hamlet': "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

When you have tinnitus, and you talk to someone from a Tinnitus Group, or you see someone from Audiology, they will emphasise the importance of having SOUND in your environment, or 'sound enrichment', and avoiding being in near silence.

So why is it important to have sound rather than silence? Sound is natural to us; it lets us know we are part of a living, moving, changing world. I'd like to look at that in a couple of ways; firstly, as it relates to the part sound plays in our everyday lives; and - secondly, as it relates to our perception and management of tinnitus.

The impact of sound on our lives is well documented in 'Hearing and Deafness' written in 1947 by Davis and Silverman, which outlines three levels of hearing.

The first of those levels relates to language. It is thought of as hearing at the 'social' level, because hearing is used to comprehend language. Words are symbols for things around us, and for the things we do; for things not immediately present, and for abstract ideas. Through language, we communicate experiences, organise our thoughts, gain knowledge; learn social and moral ways.

The second level gives us a direct sign of events to which we make constant adjustments in daily living. At this level, it is not the word 'bee' but the sound of its buzz that makes us jump. We head for the fire exit when we hear the fire alarm; we take care crossing the road when we hear a car coming. We (hopefully) get out of bed when we hear the alarm clock; we see to the baby when we hear it cry.

So we not only hear sounds on a warning level, we react to them. On first hearing tinnitus, some people hardly react at all; they see it as just a noise and attach little meaning to it.

Others react to the tinnitus very much as a warning signal. What is it telling me? What if something's going wrong? We are highly alerted to sounds on this signal level. This comes from a survival reflex response - when we were cave men, we had to be alerted to warning signals, or potential warning signals, in order to survive.

The good news is that, over time, we can 'habituate' to tinnitus sounds - and become less 'alerted' to them. They can become part of the 'background' sounds of life to which we pay little attention.

At the third level, sound is not a symbol or a warning; it is the background sound of all daily living. At this level, we react to the tick of a clock, the distant roar of traffic, vague sounds of people moving in other rooms of the house - without being aware that we actually hear them.

These incidental sounds let us feel we are part of a living world and contribute to our sense of being alive. Davis and Silverman tell us that "we are not conscious of the important role which these background sounds play in our comfortable merging of ourselves with the life around us, because we are not aware that we hear them. The real importance of this level of hearing is the creation of a background of feeling that relates us to the world at a very primitive level, somewhere below the level of clear consciousness and perception."

These background sounds are constantly changing, because the world around us is in a state of constant activity. In the natural world, and the man-made world, there is constant activity. The pattern of this activity changes with each moment and with different times of day. The third level of hearing helps maintain a comfortable sense of where we are together with our readiness to react to changes in our environment as they occur.

At any given moment, one of these background sounds may vary and attract our attention. We may for example be listening to a film at the cinema when the person in the next seat starts to cough. We then become consciously aware of them, on another level, until we realise the coughing is insignificant and our attention returns to the film. Where we experience tinnitus, it can help to use sound alongside the tinnitus that does not draw our attention, perhaps from sound generators or environmental sound enrichment; so that our attention can return to something else, something of interest to us.

So - hearing is a combination of all three processes, all inter-weaving at the same time. We hear the symbols of language, the signal of the ringing telephone, and react to the background of sounds of which we are not consciously aware. This familiar, comfortable relationship with the world around us is likely to be disrupted to some degree by the experience of tinnitus and/or hearing loss. And though it's tempting when you experience tinnitus to want to be in a quiet environment, it's much more helpful to have a background sound. The world of nature is really quite a noisy place, with a continuous background of natural sounds. But we have built solid houses, often with double glazing which retains warmth but excludes much external sound; and with soft furnishings that are sound-absorptive. This means that the rooms we live and work in can have very low levels of natural background noise, particularly at night.

In modern society, there is a tendency for more people to live alone, with more people, particularly older people, living alone in very quiet surroundings. With an increasing number of older people in the population, there are many more with varying degrees of hearing loss. Where hearing aids are not fully or properly used, this has the effect of creating a relative silence. Where you are straining to hear, you will increase the activity of your hearing system - and your awareness of your tinnitus - so it's important to use your hearing aids. If you're having difficulty with your hearing or hearing aids, tell us about it and we'll do our best to work with you to resolve the problems.

So, what are the 'sounds of silence'? In the 1950s, an experiment showed that, when people go into a very quiet room for five minutes, the majority of them will experience hearing tinnitus-like sounds.

Other experiments have shown that the hearing system itself increases in sensitivity when back-ground noise drops below a certain level, resulting in increased awareness of external sounds. There is more chance of being aware of weak sounds - including the normal activity of the hearing system - when we are in a very quiet environment.

The loudness of any sound depends on the contrast between the signal and any background noise. Think of listening to a car radio on the motorway, with the volume at a comfortable listening level. When you drive into a quieter place, the radio can seem to be uncomfortably loud. For the same reason, tinnitus will sound very loud if there is no sound enrichment. It's a bit like lighting a candle: in a very bright room, the light from the candle will be barely noticeable. In a darkened room, the candlelight will seem very bright, and will constantly draw your attention. When in silence, the focus of the hearing system can only be directed to the one sound - tinnitus.

Remember too that different sounds have many different meanings to us, and the way we react to sounds or noises will be determined by our individual interpretation of their meaning. Think of when you answer the phone, and hear the voice of someone you enjoy talking to - then think of your reaction when you hear the sound of someone you really don't want to talk to at all!

Are there other sounds you find irritating? I really dislike eating noises, and shouting pop music! How do you react to irritating, intrusive sounds? Are you able to move your attention from them? Or do you have a strong reaction, and perhaps get angry? How do you react to the sounds you enjoy? Do you find yourself smiling, perhaps relaxing?

Because we live in a busy world, we often wish we could get away from sounds, from unwanted noise; and relax in silence. In the natural world, silence is actually a warning signal, often indicating the arrival of a predator. The best environment for relaxation is not silence but one 'enriched' by nature sounds.

©Margo Boss - Hearing Therapist



SUDDEN DEAFNESS AND LOUD TINNITUS

An Audiologists advice is that anyone experiencing sudden deafness should present themselves to the nearest large A&E department. In her opinion, sudden deafness should be regarded as a proper emergency and one which needs attention within 24 hours if hearing is going to be saved. Although a GP can refer a patient with sudden deafness for immediate hospital examination, very few do. Valuable time can be lost by waiting to consult a doctor and then embarking along the lengthy route to an ENT consultant.

It is stressed that sudden deafness and sudden loud tinnitus should be treated as a matter of urgency i.e. go to A&E!

HOW DO I GET A HEARING AID?

A very common cause of tinnitus is loss of hearing. If you think you might have lost some hearing an aid (or two) can greatly reduce the impact of tinnitus. If you would like to try a hearing aid, the first step is to see your GP. He will refer you to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Doctor or an Audiologist at a local clinic or hospital or even one of the commercial partners of the NHS (e.g. Boots etc.) You can, of course, be referred to a Tinnitus Clinic and they will carry out all necessary tests.

At your appointment your ears will be checked and you will be asked some questions about your hearing. You will also have a hearing test to see if your hearing is at a level that would benefit from a hearing aid. The audiologist will discuss your hearing test and hearing difficulties and advise you about hearing aids. Not all people who come for a hearing test will benefit from a hearing aid, but advice can be given about other services that may help you.

If you decide to try hearing aids, usually impressions of your ears will be taken so ear moulds can be made. But with the more modern open dome hearing aids that are available, this might not be necessary. You will then be sent an appointment to return to have the hearing aids programmed and fitted. These hearing aids are provided free of charge on a loan basis.

Even if you might benefit from hearing aids, some people choose not to try one. If you change your mind at a later date, your GP will need to refer you

back to the clinic.

Modern digital hearing aids are available with many programmable features (including combination hearing aids that are specific to tinnitus) - your audiologist will guide you in whether they are of benefit.

Your hearing aids are provided on loan from the NHS. If they stop working they will be replaced. Batteries, repairs and appointments are free of charge on the NHS.

Because the range of hearing aids offered by the NHS is limited, some people prefer to buy a private hearing aid. If you choose this option, ensure you go to a registered hearing aid dispenser and avoid buying from one off exhibitions, people selling at the door and through advertisements. Some dispensers commit themselves to comply with the Code of Practice of the professional society and may use the initials MSHAA or FSHAA if they pass the society fellowship exam. Look out for these initials after the dispenser's name.

Private hearing aids are expensive items to purchase (about £500 +) and the repair service may also be costly. Hearing aid batteries will also have to be purchased. The range of private hearing aids is comprehensive, and many of the models now available are in-the-ear types, which are especially made for each individual's ear and hearing specifications.

Hearing tests and examinations should involve the customer in no obligation of any kind. They are usually available free of charge, even when conducted in the home. The dispenser should refer the customer to their doctor concerning any condition of the ear(s) which requires medical attention.

If a hearing aid is recommended, written particulars are provided and even after a product has been ordered there are a number of opportunities for the customer to change their mind at no cost. Some companies offer a 30 day free trial service. Check before you purchase. Supportive aftercare may be provided by registered dispensers; this can be at the practice or in the comfort of the user's home, at no extra charge. Check beforehand if this available.

A final point to make is, while the aid is away for repair or servicing unless he/she has a reserve, the user can often be without an aid.

BTW, Having hearing aids make you eligible to a Disabled Discount Card from National Rail. This card (which you have to purchase) entitles you (and your carer/companion who is travelling with you) a 30% deduction on both your fares.

BE NECK AWARE

How many of us try to cradle a phone between the neck and ear (even the modern “smartphones”). The National Back Pain Association's publication 'Back in the Office' states the practice is harmful to the back and neck.

The habit can be a potential tinnitus trigger and it could exacerbate any existing tinnitus. It is all too easy to drop into habits of bad posture and, as much of the tension and stress which exacerbates tinnitus is retained in the head, neck and shoulders, it makes good sense to break these habits as soon as we become aware of them.

The use of the Alexander Technique is designed to gradually correct these faults, bringing with it a more relaxed posture and more fluid movement to the body.

To exercise the neck using the Semi-supine Position technique:



Lie down (as illustrated above) on a firm surface with a book(s) under your head. The height of the book(s) varies according to the individual ; too many and you cramp your neck, too few and your chin is too high causing strain. Draw your feet up as close to your bottom as they will go without strain, at hip width apart, the elbows resting at the sides with hands directed across the abdomen or chest. Think of your knees being upwards away from the hip joints, elbows directed away from the shoulders. What is needed is a calm state and a clear, attentive mind.

Next turn the head slowly several times from side to side as far as is comfortable - but do not strain. Now take your head as far as is comfortable to one side. Whilst relaxing gently think about turning it further and look along the floor. After a few minutes you will find your head turns further virtually on its own ! Repeat this in the other direction. In time you will find this eases creakiness in the neck and hence your tinnitus - particularly pulsating noises.

Jane Madders, in her book on *Stress and Relaxation* also recommends 'slowly turning the head from side to side and letting your head bend first to one side and then the other remembering to keep your shoulders level. Drop your head forward then lift it so that your head is held high. Keep your shoulders down and reach up with the back part of your head as if you're being pulled up by a tuft of hair at the back.' On 'Tension in neck muscles' Jane writes - 'Feel the muscles at the back of your neck by taking hold of them as though you were picking up a kitten by the scruff of its neck. If your head is resting easily the muscles are soft. Keep hold and slowly jut your head forward to the tense position. You will feel the muscles go tight and



hard under your hand. You can sometimes see tram lines of tension in these muscles.' She further recommends that a neck-support pillow is useful for those whose neck is particularly curved forward or if there is neck pain and advises that our head is held in the middle and not to one side, or jutting forward. See this in a mirror. Move it very gently to the correct position and keep it there. Try 'Circling Shoulders' backwards to relieve muscle tension and improve circulation.

During the day, notice when you hold these muscles tight: it may be when you are driving, doing housework, telephoning or even when you're resting. Remember that you look more at ease and move with more grace when your shoulders are relaxed.

Tinnitus has fascinated us throughout history. Take comfort in knowing that tinnitus is not a modern problem. Beethoven, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Charles Darwin were all said to have experienced tinnitus. Considering the many different attempts to understand and silence these frustrating head noises, it is likely each of them was given a different explanation and solution. Like other phenomena through the ages, tinnitus was once thought to be the craft of witches and the supernatural. According to ancient Babylonian texts, the Roman Emperor Titus (39AD-81AD) had tinnitus, supposedly caused by "a buzzing gnat" in his brain. Greco-Roman medics believed tinnitus to be an indication of some imbalance between the mind's four temperaments. Even today we are yet to grasp fully the precise mechanisms of tinnitus and it has taken a collection of curious individuals and a considerable length of time even to have got as far as we currently have.

Sleeping with Tinnitus

However, you can take several steps to help you sleep better with tinnitus. The Action on Hearing Loss fact sheet about tinnitus and sleep provides the following useful advice:

- Try relaxation exercises.
- Try regular exercise. Fit people tend to sleep better. But avoid exercising too close to bedtime.
- Go to bed when you feel sleepy and not just because it is a certain time. If you are not asleep in 20 or 30 minutes, get up, go to another room and do something quiet and relaxing, like reading. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy again.
- Get up at the same time every day. This is one of the most important things you can do to improve sleep.
- Try to limit the amount of caffeine and nicotine you have at night, as these are stimulants.
- Keep your room at a temperature neither too cold nor too hot.
- Do not read or watch TV in bed before trying to go to sleep. This would only make you feel more alert.
- ‘Wind down’ for at least an hour before bedtime.
- A special clock radio or sound pillow, emitting soothing sounds in your bedroom, including the sounds of waves and birdsong may help you relax and fall asleep

COMBATING INSOMNIA

One of the difficulties faced by many people with tinnitus is the problem of getting to sleep at night. Since tinnitus seems to become louder the more tired one becomes, this can become a vicious circle where the tinnitus feeds on sleep deprivation and in turn makes it even harder to get one's rest. Whilst this is most often true for those who have only recently developed tinnitus and haven't yet come to terms with it, it can also be a problem for seasoned tinnitus people. One answer is, of course, to take tranquillisers but doctors are becoming much more reluctant to prescribe sleeping pills because of their addictive nature. So here are some hints that may help, or at the very least make you smile!

First, as far as possible, you should organise the day so that you are tired by bed time. Avoid the temptation to lie abed in the morning; get up early, and

avoid taking short naps during the day. Take as much exercise as you are able, even if it only means remaining busy in the house. If you like a drink during the evening, save it until bed time and use it to help you relax when you are in bed. If you enjoy reading, spend a few minutes with a book, and have the light switch close to hand so that you don't have to get out of bed when you feel sleepy. If you can afford a television in the bedroom with remote control and teletext, using subtitles (888) will enable you to watch without disturbing other people and you can switch off without getting out of bed.

Now comes the crunch question - how do you cope when the light is out and tinnitus once again rears its ugly head? One good way is to bore yourself to sleep. Traditional strategies such as counting sheep were intended to do just this, and there is the more modern one of actually mouthing (silently though) a word such as "the... the... the". Get the idea? If, however, you find these too mind-numbingly boring and that your mind has switched back to worrying about whatever problems have been keeping you awake in the first place, you need to establish a series of thought processes which are boring but which, at the same time, are just intriguing enough to keep the mind latched on until sleep intervenes.

One such exercise is building word ladders (guaranteed to send some to sleep within ten minutes). Think of two four letter words - they could be a random selection or might opposites such as heat and cold. Then try to change one into the other by just changing one letter at a time, but with each new word in the sequence being a proper one - for example heat > head > held > hold > cold. Whilst words such as heat and cold can be changed in four easy steps, some words lead you into a labyrinth and you fall asleep whilst lost in the middle of it. An associated exercise is to take a two or three letter word and by adding one letter at a time make new words until you can go no further: am > cam > cram > cream > scream. You will be surprised how far you can go before exhausting a particular series or before falling asleep.

Bill Griffiths—Wirral Tinnitus Group

EAR CARE

The skin of the outer ear canal and the eardrum is very thin and delicate and easily damaged. Any small scratch, especially if a sharp object is being used, will allow bacteria into the deeper tissues with the risk of infection. Even if the surface of the skin isn't broken, constant poking will irritate and inflame the skin.

Objects such as a hairgrips, if long enough, could also pierce the eardrum, which is exquisitely painful and again risks infection and the potential for permanent hearing damage.

Neither is it good to push wax around the ear a lot. Earwax is produced by special glands in the skin in the outer part of the ear canal. It's then supposed to stay in this outer part to catch dirt or dust and other small particles such as seaside sand to stop them from reaching the eardrum.

Wax is slowly moved naturally by the ear (as the skin cells move outwards from the drum) to the outer part of the ear where it rapidly becomes dry and breaks off, falling out of the ear to be replaced by fresh wax.

Earwax isn't meant to be removed by you - your body does that for you. Neither is wax meant to be pushed deeper down into the ear canal. People who continually clean their ears with a cotton buds risk pushing wax down onto the drum where it gets stuck, requiring ear drops and treatment to remove it.”

We summarise this information in our basic rules for general ear care and problem ears as follows:

On general ear care:

- Rule number one is: NEVER put anything smaller than your elbow in your ear!
- Do not scratch your ears as this may spread infection.
- Ears should never be poked with anything which might cause damage to the delicate lining of your ear canal or - worse still - even perforate your ear drum.
- Remember that your ears have a 'self-cleaning' mechanism. Do not put any-

thing in your ears without first seeking advice.

Do not use cotton buds as these can compact wax.

- If you suffer excessive wax, olive oil (or almond oil) may help the ear to clean itself, but always seek advice and guidance from your GP or practice nurse.
- Avoid spraying anything into your ears i.e. hair lacquer or any other cosmetic preparations.



- Always protect against - and preferably avoid being exposed to loud noise.

If you have problem ears

- Always keep your ears dry when showering, washing your hair and swimming. This can be done by using ear plugs (or cotton wool covered in Vaseline to make it waterproof) in the outer part of your ear. Before going swimming, check with your GP or nurse that it will not harm your ears.
- If ear wax becomes compacted and needs to be removed, be aware that syringing has been known to exacerbate tinnitus, so discuss the method used in your practice before treatment commences.
- When out of doors, protect against the cold and wind. Wear a scarf and keep your coat collar turned up.
- If your symptoms do not improve with treatment, or if they get worse, always consult your doctor.

COPING STRATEGIES

to help you manage your tinnitus

DO NOT panic. Tinnitus is usually not a sign of a serious, ongoing medical condition.

CHECK things out. The sounds you hear may actually be normal sounds created by the human body at work.

SEE an audiologist or ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT) interested and experienced in tinnitus treatment.

REVIEW your current medications (prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins and other supplements) with your medical professional to find possible causes of your tinnitus.

BE WARY of a hopeless diagnosis or physician advice like, “There’s nothing you can do about your tinnitus. Go home and live with it.” There **IS** something you can do about it!

BE a detective. Keep track of what triggers your tinnitus.

KEEP UP TO DATE about tinnitus. More and more research by the best and the brightest is bringing us closer to successful treatments and cures for tinnitus.

Find good treatment & take care of yourself

BE KIND to yourself. Developing tinnitus means you have undergone a significant physical, emotional and maybe even life-style change.

EXAMINE how you live to find ways to eliminate or reduce some stress in dif-

ferent parts of your life; stress often makes tinnitus worse.

PAY ATTENTION to what you eat. One-by-one, eliminate possible sources of tinnitus aggravation, e.g., salt, artificial sweeteners, sugar, alcohol, prescription or over-the-counter medications, tobacco. If you feel that certain foods make your tinnitus worse, try eliminating them from your diet. *(Do not stop taking medications without consulting with your health care professional.)*

DON'T GIVE UP on a treatment if it doesn't work right away. Some can take quite a while to have a positive effect.

PROTECT YOURSELF from further auditory damage by avoiding loud places and by using earplugs when you can't avoid loud noise.

Your Attitude matters

DO NOT create any negative forecasts for your tinnitus, such as "This is never going to get any better." Counting on a better future can help you create one.

TAKE HEART. In most cases people with tinnitus "habituate" to it, meaning they get used to it and notice it less than at first.

BE INVOLVED in your recovery. Consider yourself part of your treatment team where your thoughts and feelings should count.

DO NOT WASTE time blaming yourself for your tinnitus. The causes of tinnitus are varied and difficult to determine.

Line up support

LOCATE people who understand your struggles and learn that you are not alone. Have people in your life who, though they cannot "see" or "hear" your tinnitus, understand that you have it.

Join the B&DTG support group that will truly understand your struggles with tinnitus and help you sort out useful from useless information. You will find compassion, companionship and coping strategies. (The British Tinnitus Association (BTA) has information on tinnitus support groups and individual, helpful volunteers for those who live outside the West Midlands)

EDUCATE your family, friends and co-workers about tinnitus; tell them about the conditions and settings that are difficult for you; and ask them for their support. See our leaflet "*Help for the Helpers*" which could prove useful.

CONTINUE SEEKING reliable information from B&DTG and other credible sources



In the quiet of your bedroom the constant ringing or buzzing in your ear may become particularly annoying and deprive you of a good night's rest

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Many medical professionals are interested in Mindfulness Meditation as a new way of dealing with tinnitus. It is not a specific treatment for tinnitus and it doesn't cure it but, it could improve our ability to cope with it.

Mindfulness Meditation is a way of paying attention to what is happening in the present moment without allowing any negative distractions to interfere with the process. It sounds easy but it takes practice. The technique has been successfully used in clinical studies for a variety of conditions and this has been demonstrated in a number of case studies.

What is Mindfulness Meditation?

Mindfulness is a type of meditation that essentially involves focusing your mind on the present. To be mindful is to be aware of your thoughts and actions in the present, without judging yourself. Research suggests that Mindfulness Meditation may improve mood, decrease stress, and boost immune function.

How to Try Mindfulness Meditation

- Find a quiet and comfortable place. Sit in a chair or on the floor with your head, neck and back straight but not stiff.
- Try to put aside all thoughts of the past and the future and stay in the present.
- Become aware of your breathing, focusing on the sensation of air moving in and out of your body as you breathe. Feel your belly rise and fall, the air enter your nostrils and leave your mouth. Pay attention to the way each breath changes and is different.
- Watch every thought come and go, whether it be a worry, fear, anxiety or hope. When thoughts come up in your mind, don't ignore or suppress them but simply note them, remain calm and use your breathing as an anchor

If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, observe where your mind went off to, without judging, and simply return to your breathing. Remember not to be hard on yourself if this happens.

As the time comes to a close, sit for a minute or two, becoming aware of where you are. Get up gradually.

HELP FOR THE HELPERS

Much is written to try to help those with tinnitus, but little is offered to try to help those who live with or are close to those with tinnitus. It isn't easy being an onlooker. It's sometimes very hard for non-sufferers to understand what is going on. If you feel frustrated by your inability to help, just put a little distance between yourself and the sufferer for the time being. Try not to show your frustrations to the one you are trying to help, as this may make them feel guilty about spoiling your enjoyment. Try to keep a sense of humour. Try to laugh with not at the sufferer. Laughter is a great healer.

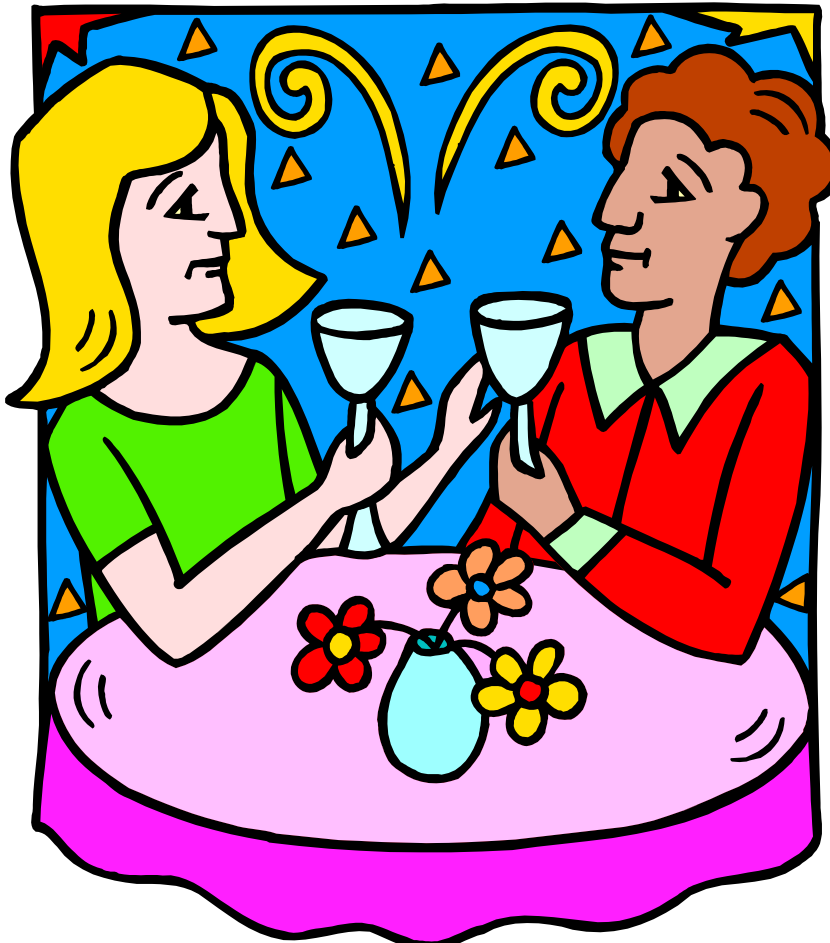
Here are some suggestions that may help you:

- Try to be supportive and don't expect progress to be rapid. Learning to cope with something unwanted that is there all the time does take time, but it will be achieved eventually. Remind the sufferer of this, as well as yourself.
- Try not to reproach a sufferer with spoiling your life. This would create extra anxiety and make them feel guilty.
- Discuss your feelings about the problem, but talk positively, trying to find ways to resolve your differences.
- Try not to allow your own life to become seriously disrupted. It's one thing to miss a night out at the pub. It's another to stop seeing family or friends because the sufferer finds it difficult. This may cause you to become resentful of the sufferer for spoiling your enjoyment of life, and this resentment could become a problem in itself. Instead try to support and encourage the sufferer.
- Sufferers need reassurance that they are still loved. This is very important as it is easy to lose confidence. A squeeze of the hand or a little hug can do wonders!
- Try to give praise when it is due when the sufferer makes progress. Don't criticise lack of progress. Sufferers know themselves when they are not coping very well.

- Try not to make a sufferer feel an outsider because of the tinnitus. Keep inviting friends and family round and going out, even if it's been difficult before. This will act as a challenge to the sufferer, and remind them of what to aim for.
- Try to encourage new pursuits, hobbies and interests, especially if the old ones are no longer so enjoyable. You too may find something to interest you.
- Notice when the tinnitus sufferer seems better, more their old self, and see if there is a pattern (don't forget the onlooker sees most of the game). Is the tinnitus less of a problem after exercise (a walk, playing bowls), after watching a comedy programme, a film, a nature programme, after a period of relaxation, a day out, listening to music, etc.? Then suggest such an activity when the tinnitus becomes distressing.

The group exists to support you as well, so do come to the meetings, read the newsletter, talk to the other members of the group.

And finally, find someone that you can talk to about your side of the problem. Remember, a trouble shared is a trouble halved.



Useful Links

The British Tinnitus Association (BTA)

(T)

British Tinnitus Association

The British Tinnitus Association was formed by people with tinnitus, for people with tinnitus, and it is important that those now able to live with tinnitus should continue to do what it set out to do: to support those who still suffer from tinnitus whilst seeking to promote medical research for the relief and cure of the problem.

Ground Floor, Unit 5

Acorn Business Park, Woodseats Close, Sheffield S8 0TB

Helpline: [0800 018 0527](tel:08000180527)

Email: info@tinnitus.org.uk

Website: www.tinnitus.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss

(Formerly RNID)



- We're experts in providing support for people with hearing loss and tinnitus.
- We provide day-to-day care for people who are deaf and have additional needs.
- We supply communication services and training.
- We offer practical advice to help people protect their hearing.
- We campaign to change public policy around hearing loss issues.
- We support research into an eventual cure for hearing loss and tinnitus.

Got a question or comment? Our friendly helpline team are waiting for your call - we offer free confidential and impartial information on a whole range of subjects relating to deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus.

Telephone 0808 808 0123 :Textphone 0808 808 9000 (both free)

website: www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Or if you want to contact our main offices, our shop, PR team or web team, the details are below. We would love to hear from you, so get in touch!

19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL

Telephone 020 7296 8000

Textphone 020 7296 8001

The Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group



The Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group was formed in 1981.

We are a registered charity and the group's aims are:-

- To give all tinnitus sufferers in Birmingham and the surrounding areas access to up-to-date information through : Meetings : Newsletters : Support literature.
- To offer anyone troubled by tinnitus the chance to meet other sufferers in a supportive environment.
- To provide opportunities for members to share ideas about coping with tinnitus.
- To support tinnitus research and work towards improvement of services available to tinnitus sufferers.

Membership

Membership of the Birmingham & District Tinnitus Group means you are kept up to date with the latest developments in the treatment of tinnitus.

You will receive a self help booklet on joining and our own quarterly newsletter will be posted to you, free of charge

For more information please call one of our "Friendly Voices and Ears" or visit our web-site or e-mail us - see back cover

Need to Talk? Contact our Friendly Voices (and Ears)

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