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A WORLD LEADER
IN SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Self help for tinnitus

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This leaflet has been written to help you learn some simple ways which may help you lessen the intrusiveness of your tinnitus and improve your quality of life.

Tinnitus is a very common symptom, and although we at the BTA recommend that everyone who has tinnitus should seek appropriate professional help, there are many measures that you can take to help yourself. It can be difficult to find something that works for you but relaxation is often a good place to start.

Relaxation and meditation

It is quite common to feel anxious and afraid when you first experience tinnitus. By relaxing more, you may be able to feel less stressed and so notice your tinnitus less. Among the different types of relaxation are yoga, tai-chi and meditation.

We are all different and you may find you prefer one type of relaxation over another. You may find a class that teaches one you like. However, you may not be able to get to classes or you may just prefer to do something yourself.

Using some simple techniques regularly may help you to improve your quality of life and make a real difference to living with tinnitus. It does take practice to develop good relaxation techniques, and it may help one

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day, but not the next – so don't give up if at first it does not seem to help.

Relaxation exercise 1

First, find a peaceful place where you feel comfortable and at ease, and where you are unlikely to be disturbed. You will need to find a time of day that suits you – perhaps you have time in the morning, or perhaps early evening to help you unwind.

Try to do these exercises for some time every day if you can. Aim for about 30 minutes but don't be too hard on yourself if you can't manage it for that long. Even 15 minutes a day can be helpful.

Complete quietness may be unhelpful for your tinnitus – if you find this is the case, then play some gentle background sound.

You are going to use a technique called progressive muscle relaxation. You can do this exercise sitting in a comfortable chair or lying on your back on a supportive surface. Whichever you choose, don't cross your arms, legs or ankles.

Think about your breathing. Notice that it has a natural rhythm. Try to breathe in a steady, even rhythm. It helps to breathe in through your nose, hold your breath for a moment and then breathe out through your mouth. Wait a moment before breathing in again. Every time you breathe out, try to release a little bit of your tension. Do this for a few minutes, until you feel ready to move on to the next step.

Now make your toes as tight as you can, really scrunch them up. Hold them like

this for a moment – and relax. Now do the same with your ankles, then your calf muscles, your thighs... work all the way up your body to your head, making sure you tense, hold for a moment, and then release the tension. Once you've done this with your whole body, focus again on your breathing – notice the rhythm, it should be even and calm.

Relaxation exercise 2

In this exercise you are going to imagine yourself in another place – as if you're actually there. What it looks like, the smells, the sounds... You can make this exercise as long as you want to and you can take your time to visualise a number of different places, such as a forest, a garden or a beach. Here is a short example of how you can do this (remember not to rush through it).

As with the first exercise, make sure you're comfortable and unlikely to be disturbed. Now imagine yourself leaving this room. You walk out of the door and follow a path... at the end of the path is another door. You open that door and inside you see a beautiful garden – you can hear birds singing, children playing somewhere in the distance. You feel a cool breeze on your skin and hear the rustle of leaves through the trees. The colours of the leaves, green, gold, red, all dance across a beautiful pond in the middle... as you walk over to the pond, you feel the soft grass under your bare feet... you dip your toes into the calm, clear pond and stop for a moment – just experiencing the beauty of everything around you...

This exercise can stop there, or you can

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spend some time in the garden and then make your way back into the room where you are, feeling more relaxed on your return.

Meditation exercise

Sit comfortably in a chair.

Relax the muscles around your eyes and soften your gaze.

Allow yourself to feel sensations in the body:

- Feet on the floor
- Legs resting comfortably on the chair
- Arms resting
- Hands soft and relaxed
- Tightness in your shoulders
- Tension in the face

Now allow yourself to experience your breathing.

Feel the gentle movements of the body as you breathe.

Pay attention to your breath:

- Entering your nose
- Passing through your throat
- Filling your lungs
- Causing the abdomen to swell
- Feeling the swell against the back of the chair

Now invite other areas of the body in...take your attention to any area where you may have pain or tension. Let any tight muscles soften and relax. Become aware of your feelings or mood and what thoughts might be passing through your mind. Be aware of all of these sensations together with your

breathing.

Now start to move gently – any small movement that you can manage, maybe moving fingers up and down, circling the feet or simply moving them side to side. Be aware of being back in the room again, but feeling more settled and at peace.

Exercise

Regular exercise helps the body achieve a higher level of well-being and in most cases this helps people to ignore and cope with their tinnitus better. If you are not used to exercise, begin gently with a swim or a walk. Increased exercise can also help you to sleep better, so try to do a range of exercises.

Diet

Some people say that particular foods or drinks can affect their tinnitus. You might come across the suggestion of giving up caffeine as it can make tinnitus louder, but a recent study found that caffeine has no effect on tinnitus.

If you suspect something is affecting your noises, try cutting it out for a couple of weeks to see if there is any improvement. If there is, repeat the trial again after a time gap, and if you get the same result, you may want to avoid that substance in future.

Don't give up on things unless you are sure they are having some effect, especially if it's something you enjoy; or you could end up feeling miserable and deprived for no reason. Do not give up several things at

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once, or you will not know which one was affecting your tinnitus. If you decide to limit these things and fancy the occasional treat, maybe try using the other strategies (such as relaxation) for those times when your tinnitus is a bit louder. For more details, see the BTA information leaflet *Food, drink and tinnitus*.

Sound

Some people find that using background sound can be very helpful for reducing the intrusiveness of their tinnitus. Listening to the radio or playing music are common ways of doing this.

Some people prefer to use more natural sounds, like a clock ticking, or a fan blowing gently and find that using these sounds through the night can be helpful. If you prefer natural sounds, you can purchase CDs or table-top devices that allow you to play sounds such as the waves of the sea or rainfall.

For more information on the use of sound, please see the BTA leaflet called *Sound Therapy*. CDs and sound generating devices are available to buy from a number of sources, including the BTA, or may be available to hire free of charge from your audiology department.

Activity

If your mind is occupied with something absorbing, it is easier to forget about the tinnitus. Work, leisure pursuits and other interests can all help to provide a worthwhile focus. If you don't have a hobby, now might be the time to start something, many people

say that painting or writing helps. Bear in mind however, that excessive activity may produce stress, so take time for relaxing activities and social interaction where possible.

Personal contact

It can often be very helpful to talk to someone who understands how you are feeling, who can reassure you about any anxieties you may have, and answer your questions.

The BTA can provide details of self-help groups and contacts in the UK, and they also run a helpline. Most of the people who run groups or are contacts have tinnitus themselves and have been helping people with the condition for a long time. Even if you don't want to take part in group activities, it can be a comfort to know there is someone you can contact.

Conclusion

Everyone is different and you will probably have an idea of what you think may help you to manage your tinnitus successfully.

Trying the strategies suggested above may be the key to getting you feeling better about your tinnitus so that you are able to carry on with the things that you enjoy. Don't try everything at once – try them one at a time so that you can find the one that suits you.

Different techniques work for different people. Searching endlessly for something to work can also cause stress so you may need to talk to a tinnitus professional.

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Resources

If you would like someone to guide you through a relaxation or meditation exercise, you can buy one of the many CDs available.

Some feature a voice talking you through a series of relaxation exercises, while others just offer pleasant, natural sounds or soothing music designed to complement relaxation. You should be able to find a relaxation/meditation class in your area.

CDs are available to buy from a number of sources, including the BTA, or may be available free of charge from your audiology department. The BTA produce a number of leaflets on tinnitus – see the list at the end of the leaflet.

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Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

For further information

Our helpline staff can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics on 0800 018 0527.

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BTA publications

Our information leaflets are written by leading tinnitus professionals and provide accurate, reliable and authoritative information which is updated regularly.

Please contact us if you would like to receive a copy of any of our information leaflets listed below, or they can be downloaded from our website.

- All about tinnitus
- Balance and tinnitus
- Complementary therapy for tinnitus: an opinion
- Drugs and tinnitus
- Ear wax removal and tinnitus
- Flying and the ear
- Food, drink and tinnitus
- Hearing aids and tinnitus
- Hyperacusis
- Information for musicians
- Musical hallucination (musical tinnitus)
- Noise and the ear
- Otosclerosis
- Pulsatile tinnitus
- Relaxation
- Self help for tinnitus

- Sound therapy
- Sources of mutual support for tinnitus
- Supporting someone with tinnitus
- Taming tinnitus
- Tinnitus and disorders of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and neck
- Tinnitus and sleep disturbance
- Tinnitus and stress
- Tinnitus services

Leaflets for children:

- Ellie, Leila and Jack have tinnitus (for under 8s)
- Tinnitus (for 8-11 year olds)
- Tinnitus (for 11-16 year olds)

We are a registered charity and currently receive no government funds to support our work. The production and distribution of this leaflet is subsidised by kind donations from our supporters. If you would like to help us to support others with tinnitus please consider making a donation online at www.justgiving.com/bta or by sending a cheque/postal order to the address on the back of this leaflet. Thank you on behalf of the UK tinnitus community.

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