

Self help for tinnitus

Beth-Anne Mancktelow
Audiologist and Hearing Therapist

Although we suggest that everyone who has tinnitus talks to their doctor about it, there are many things you can do to help manage tinnitus yourself. It can be difficult to find something that works for you, but relaxation is often a good place to start.

Introduction

Tinnitus is a very common condition. Some people do not find tinnitus bothersome, but for some, it can be very distressing. Talking to your GP is a good first step if you are finding it hard to cope with

There are also things you can do to help yourself. There's no cure for tinnitus but these tips may make living with tinnitus more manageable. It may take time to find what works for you. This might change over time.

Our Tinnitus Support Team is available if you want to talk with someone.

Relaxation and meditation

It's quite common to feel worried when you first experience tinnitus. Relaxing may help to reduce your stress, making your tinnitus less noticeable.

Relaxation techniques include yoga, tai-chi and meditation. You may find that you prefer one type of relaxation over another.

Going to a class in your area or online could help you focus, or you may prefer to do something yourself using a CD or app. Some of these have a voice taking you through a series of exercises, while others just offer pleasant, natural sounds or soothing music designed to complement relaxation.

Using simple relaxation techniques regularly may help you to improve your quality of life and make a real difference to living with tinnitus. It does take practice. You may need to vary your methods, so don't give up if at first it does not seem to help.



Tinnitus UK tries very hard to make sure our information is right, but it cannot tell you everything. It is not a substitute for medical advice. You should always check with your doctor or hearing health professional.

Here are three exercises you may like to try.

1. Progressive muscle relaxation exercise

Find a peaceful place where you feel comfortable. Somewhere you are unlikely to be disturbed. Choose 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 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.

If complete quietness is unhelpful for your tinnitus, play some gentle background sound.

Sit in a comfortable chair or lie 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.

2. Visualisation exercise

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 last as long as you want. Take your time to visualise a number of different places, such as a forest, a garden or a beach. Take your time. Don't rush.



Here's an example.

As with the first exercise, make sure you're comfortable and unlikely to be disturbed. Now imagine yourself leaving the room you are in. 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 spend some time in the garden and then make your way back into the room where you are, feeling more relaxed on your return.

3. Meditation exercise

This meditation exercise can be done anywhere. Sitting comfortably in a chair, relax the muscles around your eyes and soften your gaze. Then allow yourself to feel sensations in your body:

- your feet on the floor
- legs resting comfortably on the chair
- arms resting
- your hands soft and relaxed
- the tightness in your shoulders
- the tension in your face.

Now allow yourself to experience your breathing. Feel the gentle movements of the body as you breathe.

Pay attention to your breath and how it:

- enters your nose
- passes through your throat
- fills your lungs
- causing your abdomen to swell
- feel 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

Doing regular exercise helps the body to achieve a higher level of wellbeing. In most cases this helps people to ignore and cope with their tinnitus better. Doing more exercise can also help you to sleep better.

If you are not used to exercise, begin gently with a swim or a walk. Build this up to doing a regular range of exercises.

Diet

Some people report that particular foods or drinks can affect their tinnitus. If you suspect that something is making your tinnitus worse, 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 couple of weeks, and if you get the same result, avoid that substance in future.

Only give up things if you are sure it helps. Avoiding food and drink you enjoy could make you feel miserable for no reason. Do not give up several things at once as you won't know which one was the trigger.

If you would like to know more, you can read our leaflet *Food, drink and tinnitus*.

Activity

If your mind is occupied with something absorbing, it can be easier to forget about your tinnitus. Work, leisure activities and interests can all help to provide a good distraction. If you don't have a hobby, now might be the time to start. Many people say that painting or writing helps. Bear in mind however, that trying to do too much may produce stress, so take time for relaxing activities and social interaction where possible.

Sound

Some people find that using background sound can help reduce the intrusiveness of their tinnitus. Some listen to the radio or play music, others prefer to use more ordinary sounds from around the home, like a clock ticking or a fan blowing gently. Using these sounds through the night can be helpful.

If you prefer natural sounds such as waves or rain, there are free podcasts and YouTube videos available as well as CDs or table-top devices you can buy.

If you would like to know more, you can read our leaflet *Sound therapy*.



Talk to someone

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

Find a tinnitus support group near you. Most of the people who run groups have tinnitus themselves and have lots of experience of supporting people with the condition. We have a list of groups on our website.

Our helpline is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. It is for anyone

experiencing tinnitus themselves as well as their family and friends. The number is 0800 018 0527. You can also contact us via our web chat, text and email.

Technology

If you use a smartphone or tablet, there are many mobile apps designed to help people with tinnitus. We can't recommend a particular app. Simply go to the app store for your phone (eg Google Play, App Store) on your device and search for "tinnitus". Try a few to see which one, if any, you prefer.

A final word

Hopefully these self-help tips will help you to feel better about your tinnitus so you are able to carry on with the things that you enjoy. Don't try to do everything at once. Find what works for you.

Remember that different techniques work for different people at different times. If you are finding it difficult to cope, please talk to a tinnitus professional. Endlessly searching for a solution yourself can also cause stress.

Help and support

The Tinnitus UK Support Team can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics:

Telephone: **0800 018 0527**

Web chat: **tinnitus.org.uk**

Email: **helpline@tinnitus.org.uk**

Text/SMS: **07537 416841**

We also offer a free tinnitus e-learning programme, Take on Tinnitus at **takeontinnitus.co.uk**

References

The list of references consulted in the production of this leaflet is available on request.

Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on all our information. You can pass your comments to our Communications Team:

Telephone: **0114 250 9933**

Email: **communications@tinnitus.org.uk**

or by writing to us at the address on p6.

Tinnitus UK publications

**Available in Easy Read*

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.

For adults:

*All about 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
Ideas for relaxation without sound
Information for musicians
Mindfulness for tinnitus
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: a parent's guide
Tinnitus: a teacher's guide
Tinnitus and sleep disturbance
Tinnitus and stress
*Tinnitus services**

For children:

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



Tinnitus UK
Ground Floor, Unit 5,
Acorn Business Park,
Woodseats Close,
Sheffield S8 0TB

Helpline 0800 018 0527
Email helpline@tinnitus.org.uk
Website tinnitus.org.uk

Registered charity no: 1011145 | Registered in England
Company limited by guarantee no: 2709302