

Tinnitus - tips to help you adjust

The aim of all tinnitus sufferers is to reach the point where their tinnitus does not unduly affect their quality of life. This is known as habituation. It is important to undergo medical tests to resolve your underlying fears about tinnitus (for example, that it may be caused by a serious illness). You cannot become habituated to tinnitus if you are afraid.

Habituation to tinnitus

Once you become habituated to tinnitus:

- Your tinnitus will have no negative emotional meaning. Therefore, it will no longer unduly impact on your life.
- You will notice an improvement in your insomnia, ability to concentrate, depression and anxiety.
- You will still have some days where your tinnitus is more troublesome than usual - for example, when you are overstressed or tired.

Becoming habituated to tinnitus is like moving from the country to the city. At first you notice the traffic noises, but after 12 months you are no longer aware of them.

Understanding how our brain reacts to noise is the first step to habituation

Normal reaction to noise

When your mind first takes in a sound from the environment, it classifies it as threatening, neutral or non-threatening. The next time you hear the noise, your mind will automatically react. For instance, a car horn will usually make you more alert and ready to get out of the way of the car, even if you can't actually see it.

First reactions to tinnitus

When your mind first hears tinnitus, it cannot relate it to any previously classified noise and will classify it as potentially threatening. This places the mind and body in a state of high anxiety. If your brain maintains the perception that tinnitus is threatening, you will become anxious every time you hear your tinnitus.

Think of your tinnitus as non-threatening

If you are to become used to your tinnitus, you must start to think of it as being non-threatening. If you continue to see your tinnitus as threatening, you will continue to feel anxious and stressed.

Some things to keep in mind

Try to do these things

The more attention you pay to your tinnitus, the harder it is to become habituated to it. Try to:

- Accept tinnitus as a part of your life.
- Stop worrying about your tinnitus.
- Keep busy - focus on enjoyable and stimulating activities.
- Surround yourself with other sounds, but avoid excessive noise.
- Find relaxation and stress management strategies that work for you. These may include yoga, Tai Chi, reflexology or massage.

Try not to do these things

You can help to make tinnitus less distressing if you avoid:

- Working through an endless range of cures. Don't live in hope of a miracle cure.
- Remaining angry about your tinnitus.
- Feeling guilty about not coping.
- Talking about it constantly with family and friends.
- Constantly monitoring the level of your tinnitus.

Where to get help

- Tinnitus Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9770 6075
- Your doctor.

Things to remember

- You can become habituated or 'used to' tinnitus.
- The key to habituation is no longer feeling threatened by your tinnitus.
- The more attention you pay to your tinnitus, the harder it is to become habituated to it.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Tinnitus Association of Victoria

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