

TINNITUS MANAGEMENT

With time people with tinnitus can move from *suffering* to *experiencing* tinnitus.

What to do

It is important to understand that all these management strategies are designed to help the process of habituation and are not likely to provide a cure, unless an identified cause of the tinnitus is being treated

Management of Hearing Loss

When a hearing loss is present along with tinnitus, appropriate use of hearing aids will often greatly reduce awareness of the tinnitus. Hearing aids amplify external sounds which will help divert attention away from the tinnitus. Advances in hearing aid technology mean that almost all hearing losses can be successfully fitted.

Frequent, regular use of hearing aids will also reduce the effort of concentrating and straining to hear. This will help relieve the tiredness, anxiety and stress associated with communication difficulties.

Medication

Medication may be prescribed for sudden onset hearing loss and associated tinnitus and/or balance problems. Medication may also be prescribed to help with severe sleep disruption, as well as to control a severe emotional reaction to tinnitus.

There is, as yet, no drug available to temporarily reduce or abolish tinnitus which is frequently effective and free of side effects.

Cognitive Therapy

Cognitive therapy is a psychological approach which examines the effect of a person's thoughts, beliefs and perceptions on their emotional reaction to life's stresses. It helps people develop effective self control techniques which can be used to manage depression, anxiety, chronic pain and tinnitus.

It is an intensive, individualised method which has been shown to produce a significant reduction in tinnitus distress and improvement in psychological well-being.

Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT)

A program of TRT concentrates on demystifying tinnitus according to this model through information and counselling. Reprogramming is achieved by presenting continuous sound from low level white noise generators or, if a hearing loss is present, using hearing aids.

This approach claims, after eighteen months to two years, a high rate of success in reducing awareness of tinnitus.

Distraction Strategies

When people focus on their tinnitus in a quiet environment, it can appear to get louder as they become more and more distressed by it. Doing this is to be avoided. The challenge for people with tinnitus is to create and utilise any appropriate distraction from their tinnitus. This can be in the form of activity, using sound or using imagery, stress management and relaxation techniques.

Sound distraction is a deliberate refocussing of attention to an external sound away from the tinnitus. This is done whenever you find yourself listening to your tinnitus. This is a learned skill which may take some practice.

White noise generators (maskers) are worn like a hearing aid either in or behind the ear. They produce a white noise which can be used as a wearable sound distraction source as well as a long term TRT strategy, if used at least six hours a day.

Stress Management and Relaxation

Because stress can make tinnitus become louder, stress management is an important part of tinnitus management. This may involve identifying and, if possible, reducing external sources of stress. Individual relaxation exercises, meditation and group activities such as yoga, tai chi and stress management courses may be helpful

Sleep Management

A disrupted sleeping pattern may be experienced by people with tinnitus. Setting up a tape recorder or radio by the side of the bed so that sound distraction is easily accessible, can help to reduce anxiety associated with bed-time. Environmental sounds, gentle music or relaxation tapes would be appropriate to use in this way. A pillow speaker can be used to reduce sound disturbing anyone else in the room.

Other

Other approaches to tinnitus management may include acupuncture, hypnosis, chiropractic, physiotherapy, neck massage, jaw joint therapy and naturopathy.

More information? Contact info@hearinglink.com.au

Useful links www.tinnitus.asn.au