

STRESS

Written by Dennis Sherwood

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, usually a 'mantra'. 'The Calm Technique' by Paul Wilson, is an excellent book for those interested in learning meditation.

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 tapes can sometimes help reduce tension. There are a great many such tapes 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.'

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