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**British Tinnitus  
Association**



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# RELAXATION

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**This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about relaxation and how it can help if you have tinnitus.**

The aim of this leaflet is to try to encourage you to look more deeply into relaxation, to take a real interest in relaxation and to understand how it can help you if you have tinnitus. Stress is often linked to tinnitus and relaxation is well known as being helpful in relieving stress.

## What is relaxation?

Relaxation is something that **you** do - it is not done **to** you. No-one can do it for you, it is something that you must choose to do, in any way that suits you. There is no wrong way in which to relax, but let us be quite clear about what we mean by the word "relaxation" in this context. It is **not** "doing nothing". Most people don't relax instinctively, it is a skill that needs to be learned and practised. You need to

experience what it is like to feel relaxed so that you can take that feeling and memory with you throughout each day.

When we relax, certain changes take place in the body: the heart rate slows down as does the breathing; blood pressure drops and brain activity decreases, which is why we feel physically and mentally refreshed after relaxing.

It is best to practise relaxation when you feel good. Practise when you feel good, so that at times of stress you will, almost automatically, be able to restore calm and balance. Let it become a matter of routine, a welcome and beneficial habit that sets you up each day in a way that pleases you. You will find that you gain greater control over your emotions, over the way you react to things, and over your tinnitus.

## Breathing exercises

One way to help your body relax is by paying particular attention to your breathing. Breathing is something that we tend to take

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very much for granted. Focussing on your body's natural rhythms can be soothing. So from time to time, concentrate on your breath - just feel it enter and leave your body. Observe the gentle rhythm that breathing easily and effortlessly creates.

Now try to slow the breathing down by taking three or four slow even breaths in and out through your nose. Try to make the **in** breath take the same amount of time as the **out** breath. As you breathe **out** let go of tension particularly in your jaw, neck, shoulders and abdomen. This has a calming effect and can be combined with other rhythms, such as that of walking so, for example, you can breathe in for three steps and out for three steps.

Another exercise to do whilst sitting or standing still is to breathe in and out through your nose and then just stay quietly **without breathing in again** for a few seconds, noting the space between that breath and the next. Let no strain enter your body, just breathe in again when you feel the need. You are looking for control and the slowing down of the breath for a couple of minutes, which can be an aid to greater concentration.

The beauty and strength of the breathing exercises are that you can do them anywhere and at any time - standing, walking, sitting or lying down. They can be extended and control of the abdominal muscles can be introduced and combined with breath control. You can find more breathing exercises in books on stress management, relaxation, yoga, etc. so take an interest in learning to control your breath. Making breathing exercises a routine will allow you to see "letting go" as a first resort, not a last resort, in times of stress.

## Extended relaxation exercise

To go deeply into the practice of relaxation, more time has to be set aside. It is preferable (certainly at first) to try to practise every few days, but even once a week can bring benefits. Ideally, at least 15 minutes should be spent on this exercise. You can learn to relax to the point where your body feels as though it is hardly a part of you and your mind feels clear and uncluttered.

To get your body to be able to reach this stage, you must first make it comfortable. Make sure that you are not going to be disturbed. Make sure, too, that you are going to be warm, because your body loses heat as it winds down. Your head, back and legs should be totally supported, so use the floor, a bed or couch, or a good high-backed chair with footrest - whatever suits you best. If you wear glasses, remove them. If you find background noise helpful, play music or natural sounds that do not demand your attention.

Relax the muscles in each part of your body, working from head to toe or vice versa, paying particular attention to those areas where you know you may have tension. If any muscle groups do feel tense, then gently stretch them and let them move back quite easily into a comfortable position. If, when you relax, you feel any discomfort anywhere, then adjust your position and this will help you to relax even more deeply.

Close your eyes and spend a few moments observing the breath entering the body and then leaving it, slightly warmer and moister. As you breathe out, tell yourself to **let go**. Do this a couple of times more, saying to yourself... relax...let go...each time you breathe **out**.

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In the same way that you observe the breath in and out, observe your thoughts. These will naturally come but try not to become involved in them - just let them go. If you find your attention wandering to everyday things or if you are troubled by a problem, then very gently but quite firmly bring your concentration back into your relaxing, back into your breathing, and let go a bit more as you exhale. Check that your body has not tightened up in response to these intrusive thoughts, and then let yourself drift once more.

Try not to judge how well you are relaxing - aim just to enjoy it simply as a state of doing absolutely nothing and being at peace. If you let go, tension will leave the body and the mind of its own accord.

When you have spent as much time as you need to relax completely, gently stretch the body (like a cat does) and in your own time and in your own way, become alert and active once more.

You may find opportunities to do this during the day, or alternatively in bed first thing in the morning or just before you go to sleep. Find a comfortable chair (or bed) and sit (or lie) for a minute or two allowing yourself to let go as much as you can. Take a couple of slow breaths, then concentrate on relaxing the muscles in your face and shoulders, allowing your hands to rest in your lap. It really does not matter how you do this, but take these moments for yourself and you will gradually notice the benefits.

Over time, you will learn that no special place or expensive equipment is needed for you to practise relaxation. The ability to relax is all within you. Be kind to yourself, be gentle with yourself, look after yourself and you will greatly

benefit.

## Resources

If you would like someone to guide you through relaxation or meditation exercises, there are many CDs available. Some feature a voice talking you through a series of relaxation exercises, whilst others just offer pleasant, natural sounds or soothing music designed to complement relaxation. Alternatively, you might be able to find a relaxation/meditation class in your area.

CDs are available from the British Tinnitus Association, a number of commercial sources or they may be available free of charge from your audiology department.

CDs available from the BTA include ***Deep Relaxation: A Journey*** which is a series of six deep relaxation sessions, guided by Eileen Hewitson. Natural sound CDs available include ***Sound of the Sea on Deal Beach, Upland Sounds, Spring Garden, Wind in Aspen Leaves, Heavy Rain and Song Thrush.***

## References

Details of the references consulted in the preparation of this leaflet are available from the BTA.

## Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

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## For further information

Our helpline staff can answer your questions on any tinnitus related topics on **0800 018 0527**. You may also find our website **takeontinnitus.co.uk** helpful.

## 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. \*available in Easy Read

- 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
- Ideas for relaxation without sound
- 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 a child with tinnitus in the classroom
- Supporting someone with tinnitus
- Taming tinnitus
- Tinnitus and disorders of the temporo-mandibular 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)
- Ellie, Leila and Jack and me have tinnitus activity book (for under 8s)
- Tinnitus activity book (for 8-11 year olds)
- Tinnitus activity book (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.

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