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**British Tinnitus
Association**



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IDEAS FOR RELAXATION WITHOUT SOUND

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This leaflet has suggestions for different types of relaxation you might like to try to help you manage your tinnitus.

Why use relaxation?

Although we at the BTA recommend that everyone who has tinnitus should seek appropriate professional help, there are many things that you can do to help yourself.

It can sometimes be difficult to find something that works for you but relaxation is often a good place to start.

It is quite common to feel anxious and afraid when you first experience tinnitus. However, by relaxing more, you may be able to feel less stressed and so notice your tinnitus less.

Relaxation can be defined as “the state of being free from tension and anxiety”. There are many activities and techniques that can help you reach this state. You will find that some activities are more relaxing to you than others. There isn’t one correct way to relax -

explore a few and see what works **for you**. Depending on your mood, different ways of relaxation may be more effective at different times.

Exercise

Regular exercise helps the body achieve a higher level of well-being and in most cases this helps people to ignore and cope with their tinnitus better. If you are not used to exercise, begin gently with a walk or a swim. Why not take a bike ride in a quiet park?

Tai chi, qi gong and yoga (all of which can be adapted for people of all abilities) have been shown to be beneficial for people with tinnitus. Increased exercise can also help you to sleep better.

Creativity

Focusing on creative activities is a great way to relax without giving your mind a chance to focus on your tinnitus. Don’t set any goals or high expectations - just choose something you are interested in, perhaps a hobby you used to enjoy but has fallen by the wayside, and simply spend time concentrating on the experience, using as many senses as you can. Here are some ideas:

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Writing: Either grab a pen and some paper or open a word processing program on your computer. You could do a “stream of thought” piece, writing whatever comes to mind, or write a letter to a friend, or you could begin your first novel! Perhaps you could take up journaling or scrapbooking, either in a notebook or online. Blogging is a form of online journal and there are plenty of platforms that offer free, simple-to-start blogs. Everybody has something they’re passionate and knowledgeable about. Pick your own topic and start writing.

Draw or paint: Pick up a pad and something to make a mark with, whether that’s pencil, paints, or pen. Don’t be too harsh on yourself, just let the colours, images or lines flow.

Colouring: Colouring for adults is now hugely popular, and for good reason - it’s relaxing, and while you concentrate on your colour choices and not going over the lines, other parts of your mind may be freed up in ways that allow you to become more creative.

Whittling: Making something with your hands can be a very rewarding experience as it is very tactile. Using very sharp tools is a great motivator to focus on what you’re doing and not on your worries or tinnitus.

Knitting, crochet tapestry: With yarn and some needles or a hook, not only could you create something attractive and useful, the repetitive and tactile nature of these crafts has been likened to meditation.

Physiological relaxation

Physiological relaxation is focussing on sensations in the body to help you relax. There are many ways in which you can do this, the following are suggestions you might like to try. As with all relaxation techniques, physiological relaxation techniques will require a bit of practice before you start feeling their benefits. You may find classes locally to help you learn the techniques.

Progressive muscle relaxation

This exercise takes about 20 minutes. It tenses different muscles in turn and then relaxes them, to release tension from both your mind and body.

Make sure you are in a warm, quiet place with no distractions. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and begin by focusing on your breathing, breathing slowly and deeply.

If you have pain in certain muscles, or if there are muscles that you find it difficult to focus on, just pass over them. For each muscle group, hold the stretch for a few seconds, then relax. Repeat each cycle a couple of times. It’s useful to keep to the same order as you work through the muscle groups:

Face: push the eyebrows together, as though frowning, then release. Screw your whole face up tightly, then release.

Neck: gently tilt the head forwards, pushing your chin down towards your chest, then slowly lift again.

Shoulders: pull them up towards your ears (shrug), then relax them down towards your feet.

Chest: breathe slowly and deeply into your diaphragm so that you’re using the whole of your lungs. Then breathe slowly out, allowing your belly to deflate as all the air is exhaled.

Arms: stretch your arms away from your body, reach, then relax.

Legs: push your toes away from your body, then pull them up towards your body, then relax.

Wrists and hands: stretch your wrist by pulling your hand up towards you, and stretch out your fingers and thumbs, then relax.

Spend some time lying quietly after your relaxation with your eyes closed. When you feel ready, stretch and get up slowly.

Aromatic river rock foot bath

Place a layer of smooth, rounded stones in the bottom of a large bowl or basin. Cover the stones with warm water and add a drop or two of your favourite essential oil or some bath product if you like. Place the basin on

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a towel in front of a comfortable chair. Sit in the chair, place your feet in the basin, and move your feet back and forth over the stones, rolling them under your feet. Focus on how they feel and the textures as you do so.

Busy hands

Prayer or worry beads have been used for centuries to help people relax, meditate or pray. Having something to hold and manipulate, something to “twiddle” or fidget with, can have a calming effect.

In addition to the traditional beads, there are many sensory toys available, and “twiddle muffs” - these were originally designed for patients with dementia, but they can have a soothing effect on anyone. These are fleecy or knitted muffs which have a variety of articles attached such as beads and ribbons. As well as providing warmth and comfort, they provide sensory stimuli and something to focus on.

Breathing exercises

It is often said that the key to relaxation is breathing properly. Don't worry if you find it difficult to stay focused when you start breathing exercises. It's a skill that needs to be learned and it will come with practice.

Practise deep breathing in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Loosen or remove any tight clothes you have on. Make yourself feel completely comfortable - sit in a chair with arms and which supports your head, or lie on the floor or a bed. Place your arms on the chair arms, or flat on the floor or bed, a little bit away from the side of your body, with the palms up. If you're lying down, stretch out your legs, keeping them hip-width apart or slightly wider. If you're sitting in a chair, don't cross your legs.

Start by breathing in and out slowly and in a regular rhythm as this will help you to calm down.

Fill up the whole of your lungs with air, without strain. Breathe in through your nose. Imagine you're filling up a bottle, so that your lungs fill from the bottom. Breathe in slowly and steadily counting from one to five (don't worry if you can't reach five at first).

Then let the breath escape slowly, breathing out through your mouth, counting from one to five.

Keep doing this until you feel calm. Breathe without pausing or holding your breath.

Practise this relaxed breathing for three to five minutes, two to three times a day (or whenever you need to).

Other ideas to help you relax

Aromatherapy mists and candles: Certain fragrances (eg lavender, chamomile) are reputed to have a relaxing effect. Why not try lighting a scented candle and practicing breathing exercises?

Blowing bubbles: It isn't just for children! Blowing the perfect bubble depends on great breath control. If you like, label each one with one of your worries and watch them float away. This is also a great mind exercise to do.

Fly a kite: On a breezy day, take a kite (you can find ones that fold to fit in a pocket) and watch it swoop across the sky!

Construction toys: Lego, Airfix kits and Meccano are old favourites. They need concentration and dexterity to build, so are great for taking your focus away from your tinnitus.

Jigsaw puzzles: Another rewarding hobby that needs concentration and focus. They come in all kinds of designs, so why not pick one of a place that looks peaceful and relaxing?

Birdwatching: You can do this in your backyard by hanging bird feeders and waiting for the birds to come to you or you can go and visit a nature reserve. You don't need any fancy equipment - just see what you can spot.

Crossword puzzles, wordsearches and sudoku: These also need concentration and focus. Pocket sized books of these puzzles are easily

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available and can be used almost anywhere!

Alternative formats

This publication is available in large print on request.

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)

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Thank you on behalf of the UK tinnitus community.

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