

# Patient Information

## What is Relaxation?



Audiology Department



## Introduction

Many people learn to manage their stress levels without using conventional drugs but by using relaxation exercises, counselling or complementary therapies. If you are patient and gentle with yourself, and those around you, you will soon benefit.

### How can I learn to relax?

**Relaxation exercises** can help relieve tension in your body. You can learn these exercises from books, CDs, DVDs or relaxation classes which are taught in many tinnitus clinics and audiology departments. You could try a local adult education course in relaxation techniques, or a meditation or yoga class.

**Complementary therapies**, also known as alternative therapies, aim to treat you holistically. That is, to work with you as a whole person rather than on the condition directly. So while complementary therapies may not work directly on your tinnitus, they may help to alleviate the stress and anxiety associated with the condition.

Complementary therapies include: acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic, herbal medicine, homeopathy, hypnosis and hypnotherapy, osteopathy, craniofacial therapy, reflexology and Siatsu.

Different therapies suit different people and what works for one person may not work so well for another. It's a case of 'try it and see'.

**Counselling** is a working relationship between you and a counsellor that allows you to explore difficulties in your life. There are several kinds of counselling available, all of which can help if you have tinnitus and want to talk about it. Being able to talk to someone who will listen and show understanding can be comforting. It can help to relieve your fears and, therefore, reduce your stress and anxiety levels.

If you think you would benefit from counselling speak to your GP (or your audiology department or tinnitus clinic if you attend one) about getting a referral.

## The benefits of relaxation

When you are relaxing, the following changes take place:

**Physically** - Your muscles let go of tension so that toxins can be cleared from your bloodstream. Your breathing becomes more even. Your blood pressure drops and your heart beats more regularly and slowly. Other organs, including the brain, slow down their activity.

**Mentally** - You decrease your response to any type of symptom, including tinnitus. Concentration and decision making become easier because you are mentally refreshed.

**Emotionally** - You feel 'quieter', calmer and more confident because it does not take so much effort to cope with things. You feel able to take life as it comes without over-reacting. After a period of relaxation, many people find that they can get things back into perspective. Difficulties that you previously perceived as huge can shrink back to their right proportions.

## Can medication help?

If you feel that you need a little extra help to reduce anxiety or depression, your GP may prescribe sedatives, tranquilisers or anti-depressants.

- **Sedatives** have a calming effect and can help you to sleep. They may also help you to feel less anxious.
- **Tranquilisers** are particularly helpful in reducing anxiety.
- **Anti-depressants** are mainly prescribed for improving mood and treating depression. They can also reduce anxiety and help you to sleep.

## Can improving my general health help?

Yes! Ensuring that you have a well-balanced diet and regular exercise will help your overall wellbeing and give you a more positive outlook. Your GP can give you advice about exercise and improving your diet.

It was previously thought that caffeine was a contributing factor to tinnitus, and some people found that reducing their caffeine intake (drinking less coffee, tea, chocolate and cola) helped their tinnitus and their sleep. However, recent research has demonstrated that reducing caffeine intake does not reduce tinnitus and that any benefits from doing this are coincidental. Of course, if you do find that reducing your caffeine intake helps your tinnitus, keep doing it!

That said, we have set out some basic relaxation exercises in this booklet to give you some idea of how you can try to relax yourself. These will not suit everyone and may need to be adapted for your needs, but they are used widely and very successfully in tinnitus clinics to help people relax properly, stay calm and in control.

### Getting started

Choose a time to practice relaxation when the house is quiet and in a room where you feel at ease. Make sure that you will not be disturbed - put a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on door if necessary!

- Make sure you are comfortable. Sit in a good armchair or lie on your bed, making sure that you have some support for your head.
- Choose a key word – such as 'calm', 'relaxed', 'peaceful'. You will use this word to help induce relaxation, so choose carefully.

- Create a relaxing picture in your mind. Popular images are of a tropical beach scene, a peaceful mountain meadow, being in the woods or a beautiful garden - choose something that works for you. This could be anywhere you have felt relaxed and safe before.
- Once you have created a visual image in your mind, expand on it to include sounds, smells, touch and whatever other information helps to build a really complete image.



RÉCIT préscolaire

## Relaxed breathing

- Once you have followed the steps 'getting started' above, place one hand on your tummy, just below your rib cage. Place your other hand on your chest.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose into the 'bottom' of your lungs. Send the air down as low as you can, you should feel the hand on your tummy rise. Your chest should move only slightly.

- When you have taken a full breath in, pause for a moment. Then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Be sure to breathe out fully. As you breathe out slowly, the hand on your tummy will lower again. At the same time, say your key word to yourself in your head.
- Repeat until you have done ten slow, deep, tummy expanding breaths, each time saying your key word in your head during the out breath. Try to make the out breath last longer than the in breath.
- Try to keep the rhythm of this breathing smooth and regular. It will help to slow down your breathing if you slowly count to three while breathing in [1...2...3...] and slowly count to four on breathing out [1...2...3...4]. Don't forget to pause briefly at the end of each in breath.

You should then be breathing like this:

Slow in breath... Pause... Slower out breath. Repeat ten times.

- As you become more practiced you can increase the time you spend on each breath, particular the out breath. After a while, you may be able to count to ten on the out breath. If you start to feel lightheaded whilst practicing, stop for 15 to 20 seconds, then start again. You may be breathing too quickly.

## Muscle relaxation

To start with, concentrate on your breathing for a few minutes. Breathe slowly and calmly. Each time you breathe out say words to yourself such as 'peace' or 'relax'. Then start the muscle exercises, working around the different muscle groups in your body.

- **Hands** - clench one hand tightly for a few seconds as you breathe in. You should feel your forearm muscles tense; then relax as you breathe out. Repeat with the other hand.

- **Arms** - bend an elbow and tense all the muscles in the arm for a few seconds as you breathe in; then relax as you breathe out. Repeat the same with the other arm.
- **Neck** - press your head back as hard as is comfortable and roll it slowly from side to side; then relax.
- **Face** - try to frown and lower your eyebrows as hard as you can for a few seconds; then relax. Then raise your eyebrows (as if you were startled) as hard as you can; then relax. Then clench your jaw for a few seconds; then relax.
- **Chest** - take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds; then relax and go back to normal breathing.
- **Stomach** - tense the stomach muscles as tightly as possible; then relax.
- **Buttocks** - squeeze the buttocks together as much as possible; then relax.
- **Legs** - with your legs flat on the floor, bend your feet and toes towards your face as hard as you can; then relax. Then bend them away from your face for a few seconds; then relax.
- Repeat the whole routine 3-4 times. Each time you relax a group of muscles, note the difference of how they feel when relaxed compared to when they are tense. Some people find it eases their general level of 'tension' if they get into a daily routine of doing these exercises. When you are relaxed, say your key word or recall your relaxing image and relax even more.
- **Allow yourself time** – it usually takes several weeks to become good at relaxation, be patient with yourself if you find it hard.

## Where can I find products to help?

Your audiology department may be able to provide you with a sound generator also known as a 'tinnitus relaxer'. These generate soothing sounds to distract you from your tinnitus and help you to relax. Over time, they may help you to 'train' your brain to 'ignore' your tinnitus.

You can also buy tinnitus products.

**Action on Hearing Loss** (formerly RNID) is the Royal national charity helping people confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss to live the life they choose. They sell a range of products to help manage tinnitus, including:

- **Wearable sound generators** – these look a bit like hearing aids and produce white noise (a 'shh' sound).
- **Bedside or desktop sound generators** – these play a range of soothing sounds.
- **Sound pillows** – these are normal pillows that have speakers inside. You can connect them to your sound generator, stereo or personal music device. You can listen to sounds without disturbing your partner, and without the discomfort of earphones or headphones.
- **Pillow speakers** – similar to sound pillows, these are mini speakers that you can put under your pillow and connect to your sound generator or personal music device.
- **'Tune out Tinnitus' CDs** – choose from water, nature, abstract or everyday sounds.

You can order these from their helpline detailed on their website at <https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/information-and-support/tinnitus/>



## Can I use ordinary household equipment?

Yes! You may already have plenty of things around the house that you can use to distract you from your tinnitus. You could try:

- **Desktop fan** - often the cheaper the fan, the louder the whirring noise! If you don't already have one, you can expect to pay from about £15 upwards. Try DIY stores or shops that sell electrical goods.
- **Radio** - a radio tuned off-station on FM creates a 'shh' noise that is similar to white noise.
- **Personal CD and MP3 players** - these direct sounds into the ears through headphones or earphones. Used at sensible volume levels, they are perfect for sound therapy. You can also use them to play white noise or relaxing sounds.
- **Indoor water features** - flowing water can have a calming influence and provide a relaxing background of water sounds. Flowing water sounds tend to relax the mind and for some, the sound of flowing water can provide just the right level of background white noise.

Why not experiment to see what works for you ...

### Additional information

There are also a variety of relaxing CDs available that you may like to try listening to. These can be purchased from high street shops or online. If you need further information, please ask a member of the Audiology team.

## Where can I get further support?

**Action on Hearing Loss** - Free support and information on their website:

<https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk/information-and-support/tinnitus/>

**Specialist products** - Visit their online shop to see their full range of products for people with tinnitus and/or hearing loss at

[www.hearinglossconnevans.co.uk](http://www.hearinglossconnevans.co.uk)

Or you can request a copy of their catalogue by contacting the **Customer Services team** directly:

Connevans Limited  
Bridge House  
1 utfield Road  
Merstham  
Surry RH1 3EB

Telephone: 01737 247571

Email: [askquestion@connevans.com](mailto:askquestion@connevans.com)

## Connect Online

Connect with a supportive group of people with tinnitus through the Tinnitus Forum. Share what works for you, and pick up some other great tips.

**Visit** [www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusforum](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/tinnitusforum)

Or you can also connect with others through

**Facebook** page: [www.facebook.com/actiononhearingloss](http://www.facebook.com/actiononhearingloss) and

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/actiononhearing](http://www.twitter.com/actiononhearing)

**If you require further help or information, please contact the  
Audiology Department:**

**Lister Hospital**

Level 3, Yellow zone, Area 10  
Coreys Mill lane  
Stevenage  
Hertfordshire SG1 4AB  
Telephone: 01438 284055

**New QEII Hospital**

Howlands  
Welwyn Garden City  
Hertfordshire AL7 4HQ  
Telephone: 01707 247576

**Email:** [audiology.enh-tr@nhs.net](mailto:audiology.enh-tr@nhs.net)

**[www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)**

You can request this  
information in a different  
format or another language.

Date of publication: February 2016  
Author: Feniya Siyavudeen  
Reference: Relax/Tinnitus      Version: 2 (July 2020)  
Review Date: July 2023  
© East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust