

**Relaxation and Stress Management for people with
Tinnitus**

Claire Gatenby, Chief Hearing Therapist from the Audiology Department at the
Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital



In this session, Claire discussed how to manage stress effectively through relaxation exercises. Awareness of tinnitus may make us feel stressed, which alongside stress present in our everyday life, can continue the cycle of producing and maintaining the tinnitus pattern. Stress can have negative effects, but it can also have positive effects. For example, stress can motivate us and enable us to stay focused and alert, which is essential for emergency situations.

Our bodies respond to stressful situations by releasing the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol. The release of adrenalin causes changes to the blood flow, increasing your heart and breathing rate - so as to get us ready for 'fight or flight'. However, the effects of adrenaline subside more slowly with emotional stress - making us feel agitated for a long time. Further to this, the levels of cortisol present in our body can increase in times of stress. The short term effects can be beneficial, such as more energy, less awareness of pain, heightened memory and increase in immunity. However, the long term effects can lead to stress related health problems, such as imbalances in blood sugars, high blood pressure and reduced ability to think clearly. It is important to remember that how you perceive and respond to events or life changes can really have an impact.

Managing Stress

Claire discussed a range of ways to manage stress in our everyday life, such as taking up a hobby, spending time with family and friends, and reflecting on what you have achieved at the end of a day - instead of worrying about what you have not done.

The natural answer to stress is relaxation, which Claire encouraged us to practice as part of our daily routines. A few of these exercises are outlined below. Why not have a go at some of them, and find the ones which you are comfortable with and suit

If you have any comments or questions regarding the Tinnitus Support Group, please contact:
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your lifestyle? By relaxing we are turning down our adrenalin and calming our tinnitus down.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being aware of the moment, and not thinking worrying thoughts. Clair demonstrated an activity where we each held a shell, and whilst closing our eyes, thought about the shell's texture and how it felt in our hands. To increase this skill, Claire suggested to be aware of the nature and landscape around us whilst we are doing our daily tasks, such as driving. It is important to notice things around you, and think about the now - being reflective is key.



Palming

This is an exercise for relaxing the eyes - but it also has a calming effect, when combined with gentle relaxed breathing. Begin by rubbing your hands together, fingers pointing upwards, until they feel warm. Place your hands over your eyes with the heels of your hands resting on the cheekbones. Your palms should cup your eyes and your fingers should rest gently on your forehead. With your eyes open or closed, visualise the colour black. Start to notice your breathing - allowing it to become slow and gentle. Breathe out in long bursts, and pause before breathing in again. When you are ready to come back to alertness, you will need to re-adjust your eyes to the light. With your eyes closed, slide your hands down your face so that the light is slowly let in by spreading your fingers.

Visualisation

This is a form of clinical hypnosis, which turns down the volume of the tinnitus. Imagine a relaxing scenario, for example a woodland area, such as the image Claire used in the session. Close your eyes and imagine that you are there, thinking about the sounds, smells, and what you can see. This will help you focus your thoughts into a relaxing place, enabling you to escape from external thoughts and fully relax.

Next TSG meeting

Our next meeting will be on Monday 14th September 2015, starting at 6:30pm. This talk will be an opportunity to hear Dr Laurence McKenna, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital, discuss the psychological approach to tinnitus management.

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