

COMBATING INSOMNIA

by Bill Griffiths of the Wirral Tinnitus Group
with a little helping hand from a few members of the Birmingham Group Committee

One of the difficulties faced by many people with tinnitus is the problem of getting to sleep at night. Since tinnitus seems to become louder the more tired one becomes, this can become a vicious circle where the tinnitus feeds on sleep deprivation and in turn makes it even harder to get one's rest. Whilst this is most often true for those who have only recently developed tinnitus and haven't yet come to terms with it, it can also be a problem for seasoned tinnitus people. One answer is, of course, to take tranquillisers but doctors are becoming much more reluctant to prescribe sleeping pills because of their addictive nature. So here are some hints that may help, or at the very least make you smile!

First, as far as possible, you should organise the day so that you are tired by bed time. Avoid the temptation to lie abed in the morning; get up early, and avoid taking short naps during the day. Take as much exercise as you are able, even if it only means remaining busy in the house. If you like a drink during the evening, save it until bed time and use it to help you relax when you are in bed. If you enjoy reading, spend a few minutes with a book, and have the light switch close to hand so that you don't have to get out of bed when you feel sleepy. If you can afford a television in the bedroom with remote control and teletext, using subtitles (888) will enable you to watch without disturbing other people and you can switch off without getting out of bed.

Now comes the crunch question - how do you cope when the light is out and tinnitus once again rears its ugly head? One good way is to bore yourself to sleep. Traditional strategies such as counting sheep were intended to do just this, and there is the more modern one of actually mouthing (silently though) a word such as "thethe the". Get the idea? If, however, you find these too mind-numbingly boring and that your mind has switched back to worrying about whatever problems have been keeping you awake in the first place, you need to establish a series of thought processes which are boring but which, at the same time, are just intriguing enough to keep the mind latched on until sleep intervenes. One such exercise is building word ladders (guaranteed to send some to sleep within ten minutes). Think of two four letter words - they could be a random selection or might opposites such as **heat** and **cold**. Then try to change one into the other by just changing one letter at a time, but with each new word in the sequence being a proper one - for example **heat > head > held > hold > cold**. Whilst words such as **heat** and **cold** can be changed in four easy steps, some words lead you into a labyrinth and you fall asleep whilst lost in the middle of it. An associated exercise is to take a two or three letter word and by adding one letter at a time make new words until you can go no further: **am > cam > cram > cream > scream**. You will be surprised how far you can go before exhausting a particular series or before falling asleep.