

This is printed as part of a series of occasional papers produced by the BIRMINGHAM TINNITUS GROUP presenting a variety of viewpoints to offer information and support for our members.

Always consult your doctor on any health matter

RELAXATION AND YOU

A six lesson course to follow in the comfort of your own home
by Eileen Hewitson

LESSON FIVE

Do you still find yourself sometimes going round in circles? Despite all your efforts to calm down, to become involved in pleasurable activities, to stay cheerful, still you find yourself spiralling gloomily downwards. You may be familiar with the old vicious circle of feeling under the weather (maybe only a cold, perhaps something more debilitating) and, because the body is under physical strain, you feel "down". Because you feel down, everything else requires that much more effort to cope with, and this includes your tinnitus, which then seems louder. Or, maybe you are worrying about the family, a friend, work, money, a journey, anything at all. This takes up a lot of your mental energy, so you feel tired, yet the churning thoughts hinder you from sleeping well, so you face each day tired, which makes you more aware of your tinnitus, which adds to your original worry. And so it goes on, round and round in an endless circle of worry, tiredness and tinnitus.

If you can recognise that this is happening to you, then you have made the first important step towards preventing this circle turning faster and faster, sweeping you along with it. All you have to do is to break into the vicious harmful circle and then replace it with a good beneficial one. Here is one for you to try. It doesn't actually matter where you start, because, since it is circle, you will come back to where you started.

- First relax the shoulders and jaw. Let them sag
- Next take a few slow, even, quiet breaths
- Then feel yourself taking back control and this will allow the thoughts to quieten a little
- Then a feeling of calmness will follow, succeeded by an increased ability to cope with whatever it is that is making you tense
- Now you can regain confidence in yourself, so that you can do whatever it is that you have to do
- Because you now feel more sure of yourself, you can relax a little, which means that your muscles soften a bit more, so you are at the start of the good circle once again, and you can repeat the circle of relaxing the muscles, slowing the breath, feeling quieter, calmer and more confident.

So, in a nutshell - relax the muscles - slow the breath - control and calmness follow - increased confidence helps you to relax more - and so on - and so on

Find your own good circle, adapt it, use it; make it work for you.

And now just a few words about what happens to you, when you set time aside for yourself. During relaxation, changes take place and your physical, mental and emotional well-being are affected.

Physically, the muscles let go of tension so the toxins can be cleared from the blood stream. Breathing becomes more even. Blood pressure drops and the heart beats more regularly and slowly. Other organs, including the brain, slow down their activity.

Mentally, because brain activity is at a different level to when you are active, you actually decrease your response to any type of symptom, including tinnitus. Concentration is aided, and decision making is 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 overreacting. After a period of relaxation, many people find that they can get things back into perspective, and the difficulties which they had perceived as

huge, shrink back into their right proportions.

By learning to relax you are taking an active part in controlling your tinnitus. We know that people who are helping themselves with their symptoms (whatever they may be) do feel better and actually get better.

So relaxation may not reduce your tinnitus, but it can alter your response to it and it will help you deal with it much much better.

Take these thoughts with you until we meet again..

Reviewed in April 2008