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Quiet Times - December 2003

How *Stress* Affects Tinnitus

By Barry Keate

Having lived with tinnitus for more than 30 years, I know first hand how stress has the ability to dial up the intensity of the ringing in my ears. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that on a scale of 1 to 10, severe stress can turn a Level 3 tinnitus into a Level 7, virtually overnight. There are many causes of tinnitus, but no matter what the cause, stress is its worst aggravator. Therefore it is necessary to manage stress and prevent it from overwhelming our lives.



With tinnitus, the body often reacts as if it is being threatened. When the tinnitus is constant and prolonged, the physical responses such as anxiety, depression and insomnia can aggravate the tinnitus. Prolonged stress will make the tinnitus noises much louder than they would be

in a relaxed state.

Stress is a natural response to outside stimulus, and can result from both positive and negative experiences. When the body is stressed, chemical and physical changes can occur. Blood vessels restrict and reduce circulation, the heart rate increases as well as breathing rate and blood pressure. Positive and negative stress results in the same chemical and physical changes. Finding a new job, buying a house, getting married, all cause stress. The real damage to our minds and bodies occurs when stress is continuing and unresolved.

Stress always attacks us at our weakest point, whether physical or mental. Whatever is bothering us will become worse under stress. Tinnitus causes continuous stress in many people and the stress, in turn, makes the tinnitus worse.

There are many ways to manage stress. Exercise is one of the very best. Brisk walking every day is helpful, as is any aerobic or weight bearing exercise. Stress reduction techniques such as relaxation exercises, meditation, yoga, and martial arts can also be very helpful.



Hypnotherapy and Biofeedback

Biofeedback and hypnotherapy can both be used to manage stress. Biofeedback is a relaxation therapy that teaches people to consciously control automatic functions of the body such as pulse and brainwave

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activity. Electrodes are attached on the head and neck of a person and readings of skin temperature, muscle contractions and heart rate are fed into a monitor. The readings are displayed as blinking lights or audible beeps so the person can monitor these functions. Patients are taught to relax during the sessions and the lights or beeps are reduced in response to the relaxed state. Over time, the person learns to control these functions and to consciously lower the level of stress. There are biofeedback centers in most major cities in the US.

Hypnotherapy is another stress reducing therapy. During hypnosis, the practitioner suggests to the hypnotized person to change their thought patterns and emotional responses to stress and tinnitus. It is a deeply relaxing therapy. People can easily be trained in the art of self-hypnosis and can practice it themselves at home or work. The hypnotic state is not like being asleep, as is popularly depicted. Brain waves are as active during hypnosis as they are during full wakefulness.

A Simple Meditation Anyone Can Do

I know a good relaxation technique that I was taught by a Psychiatrist when I was experiencing the worst of my tinnitus 12 to 15 years ago.

- Sit in a comfortable chair in a relaxed pose. Breathe slowly and deeply for 1-2 minutes. Use your diaphragm to completely fill your lungs, and then slowly release.
- Concentrate on your toes and consciously relax them thoroughly. Make sure your toes are absolutely relaxed.
- Slowly move up your body, concentrating on each part until it is totally relaxed; first your legs, then your stomach, chest, arms, and fingers.
- Move your concentration to your neck, then head. By now your entire muscle system should be in a state of total relaxation.
- Maintain the relaxed state for five minutes, and then stop. Repeat this exercise daily.

Diet is also very important in the reduction of stress and tinnitus. Noted tinnitus authority, Dr. Michael Seidman states that it is imperative that people with tinnitus adhere to an excellent diet based on all food groups. He recommends that they reduce or eliminate their use of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, high fat foods, salt and simple sugars. It has been our experience that salt is a major aggravator of tinnitus for many people. I have heard over and over that a person's tinnitus was lowered upon reducing their salt intake and conversely increased after eating a salty meal. Sugar is also a trigger for some people.

B Vitamins

B-Complex vitamins are extremely important in managing stress and regulating the nervous system. B vitamins are quite unstable and are easily destroyed during cooking and food preparation. They are also flushed through the body easily and need to be restored on a daily basis.

All B-Complex vitamins are interdependent, meaning they work best when in combination with other vitamins in the B family. They help keep the nervous system tuned up and act as stress reducers and energy enhancers. Some of the major B vitamins and their functions are:

- B-1 (thiamine) supports metabolism and brain function. One of its most important functions is keeping the nervous system healthy. Clinicians use B-1 to treat nervous system disorders.



- B-2 (riboflavin) is helpful in relieving stress and reducing fatigue. It can also help lift the mood and fight depression. (It will cause urine to become a yellow-green fluorescent color but this is not harmful.)
- B-3 (niacin) is used as a natural drug to lower cholesterol levels. It is the most cost-effective and safe medication to lower the bad LDL cholesterol and increase the good HDL cholesterol in the blood. High amount of niacin can cause a "flushing" effect to the face which disappears rapidly once it has been absorbed.
- B-5 (pantothenic acid) is known as the anti-stress vitamin because it supports the adrenal glands. It is used to treat stress and fatigue.
- B-6 (pyridoxine) is often considered the most important B vitamin. It helps produce energy and is known as the good-mood nutrient. It is essential for healthy nerves.
- B-12 (cobalamin) is one of the more mysterious of the B vitamins. It is known as an "energy vitamin" and is important in the production of neurotransmitters in the brain, such as dopamine and serotonin. These neurotransmitters affect your moods, sleep patterns and many other psychological functions. Clinicians use vitamin B-12 for a wide range of problems that affect energy level, weight and the nervous system.

The B-Complex vitamins are the basis of Arches Tinnitus Stress Formula™ and vitamin B-12 is the foundation of Arches Tinnitus B-12 Formula™. You can learn more about these important vitamins and their specific relationship with tinnitus on ["The Importance of B Vitamins"](#) in this newsletter.

Go With the Flow

In recent decades, scientific studies have supported the concept that our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual selves are inseparable. Our mental, emotional and spiritual health are just as important in protecting us from chronic illness as diet and exercise. Feeling connected to yourself and others, having a sense of purpose in life, feeling hopeful, being loved and to love, all help you create the life you want for yourself and are the key ingredients for maintaining overall health.



Our stress levels can be lowered just by embracing simple concepts such as "accepting life on life's terms," and "live and let live." Striving to control all aspects of our lives can elevate stress and result increased risk of heart disease and other ailments including tinnitus. True control in life comes from learning to recognize when we do and don't have control and to know when we should or should not take action. Take a deep breath and go with the flow.



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