

Sound Therapy

When do I listen to sounds?

The cornerstone of tinnitus management for most people is sound therapy. It's simple, and is done with things you already have. You can begin today. The first rule in sound therapy is to **use sounds when your tinnitus is bothering you**. The positive effect of sound is the starting point to tinnitus management.

How much do I listen to these background sounds?

Most people find their tinnitus is more noticeable and bothersome when it is quiet. You can begin to enrich your environment with sound to reduce the intrusiveness of tinnitus and help to distract from it. This is called "sound enrichment." If your tinnitus is distressing much of the day, having sounds around you most of the day may be the most beneficial. Tinnitus is commonly less annoying when you are in a sound-rich environment. Sound enrichment works by reducing the perceived loudness of your tinnitus. It also reduces the strength of the tinnitus-related neural or brain activity, which in turn will reduce the activation of the part of your brain (the limbic system and autonomic nervous system) that create a negative association with hearing the tinnitus.

What type of sound should I use?

Sounds of nature, such as rain or wind, are particularly easy to habituate to. We are used to the presence of these sounds, and they typically do not induce negative reactions. Everyday neutral sounds, such as a fan, heating or A/C system are known to be easily acceptable as well. The sound of water, such as a brook or rain, delivered by table-top instruments can be used for a long time without inducing annoyance. Music can also play a special role when used to enrich background. Music is known to: Reduce stress, promote learning, help to induce changes in cognitive functions and promote recovery from traumatic events, including health problems. The key is to find **something YOU find pleasant, relaxing or soothing – a sound that is not annoying or intrusive**.

How loud should I play these sounds?

You are not trying to play any sound so loud that it completely drowns out (or "masks") your tinnitus. The goal of listening to these sounds is not to cover up the tinnitus, but to reduce the contrast with the background. Secondly, sounds may have soothing qualities that promote relaxation and distract your attention from the tinnitus. Typically, you should be able to have a conversation with someone while listening to the sounds with no interference.

How do I listen to them?

The short answer is, any way you can. A radio, MP3 Player or home streaming devices all work. Our favorite is free sound **apps via a smartphone or tablet through speakers or headphones/earbuds**. Hearing aids also have Bluetooth capabilities to allow you to stream these sounds directly to the hearing aids. Table-top sound generators are readily available and inexpensive and can be portable as well. You can use other equipment you already have such as your computer, radio or TV. Many TV cable stations have several music stations that offer a nice variety of music that meets the requirements discussed above.

How long do I use sound enrichment?

Once your tinnitus is under control and no longer has an impact on your life, you will naturally "wean" yourself away from using sounds. Successful tinnitus management results with tinnitus no longer having an impact on your life. You do not perceive your tinnitus most of the time and even when you do perceive it, it is no longer bothersome. When the perception of tinnitus no longer creates a reaction, you

can easily "tune it out" with little or no effort. If you experience increases in your tinnitus, return to using your sounds as needed until you gain control again.

For people who find their tinnitus only mildly disturbing, using sound enrichment as needed may be enough. For those whose tinnitus is more intrusive and affects daily activities, it may be necessary to use sound in a more structured approach on a daily basis for several months for long-term reduction in tinnitus. This typically involves using sounds a minimum of two or four hours throughout the day (does not have to be all at once). You can use sounds as much as needed to provide relief.

Is this all I need to do to control my tinnitus?

For people with more disturbing tinnitus, more than just sound enrichment may be needed. Sound therapy is using a consistent sound on a daily basis for several hours preferably at ear level. This is done in a structured approach and works best when it also includes counseling and guidance from a professional trained in tinnitus management. The initial visit and follow up visits are relatively short (one hour) and infrequent. This treatment typically continues for about six months (may be longer depending on severity) for maximum benefit and to reduce relapses. Most people will see significant improvement after one to three months. We may also add other techniques such as relaxation practices (deep breathing, body scans, mindfulness, other meditations) and cognitive behavioral tools (working with thoughts).