

STRESS & RELAXATION

METHODS OF OVERCOMING STRESS AND IMPROVING RELAXATION WITH TINNITUS

Stress is something that you do not realize how much is present until you are rid of it. Keeping stress levels down can help you cope better with your tinnitus, help you sleep better, and reduce any anxiety, tension and depression. It also improves your concentration, reduces the likelihood of illness, and generally makes life so much more effortless and enjoyable.

The human body responds to stress in a way quite unchanged from the 'cave man' era, where stress meant a physical hazard and the need for flight or fight from the dangerous situation. Your muscles tense automatically, ready for action, breathing rates increase, and the body produces chemicals called adrenaline and cortisol, which serve to prepare you for action.

Many peoples' reaction to their tinnitus is very similar to this flight or fight response, where the noise is perceived as a serious threat at least to their perceived quality of life. The stress and tension that results can both amplify the tinnitus and reduce the ability to cope with it!

In the late 20th century, it is unlikely that our stressors are going to be immediately life threatening. However, our re-

sponse remains unchanged, and this can become a problem after prolonged periods of excessive stress without relief. Damage can begin to accrue in the form of an inability to cope, sleeplessness, muscular stiffness, headaches, depression and anxiety. You can imagine how these symptoms are going to effect your ability to cope with tinnitus!

The ability to relax is also a natural function for humans, but most of us in the modern world have now lost this ability. There are numerous approaches to managing your stress, and many of these techniques can be learnt at home. It can be quite different to learning most other skills, as you cannot force relaxation to happen, but instead need to just facilitate the process and it will. Remember that you will need patience and practice to learn the techniques and apply them successfully, but this will certainly prove itself to be very worthwhile.

Reducing stressors in your life

To properly reduce your level of stress, try to list all the other areas in your life where there is conflict, excessive worry, uncertainty, or other things that are causing you to feel stressed. Then try to list why each one of

these might be causing a stressful feeling. Then you can concentrate on fresh ways of resolving these problems.

Perhaps you might need to delegate some of your duties to others, or to seek the help of a relevant professional. One example is that a financial guidance counsellor could potentially reduce your money worries.

Responding to Stress

Your emotional response to a given situation can have a huge bearing on whether it becomes a significant stressor or not. If you continually bottle up emotions like disappointment, anger or frustration, your stress levels will soar! Assertiveness training can be a very productive way to learn how to express your needs and emotions without trampling on others' rights, and thus minimize this insidious form of stress. Communicating how you are feeling with a close friend, family member, or counselor is another stress 'safety valve'.

Successful and happy people tend to respond to a potentially stressful situation as a challenge, and as an opportunity to learn from the experiences. They are also likely to feel that they have control over their stressors. Choosing this type of attitude can be a big help in reducing

Some Tips for Managing Stress and Relaxation

- Prepare for the morning the evening before i.e. iron work clothes, prepare lunches etc.
- Do nothing which after being done requires you to tell a lie
- Eliminate (or restrict) the amount of caffeine in your diet
- Plan ahead. Fill up your gas tank before its left with 1/4 of a tank
- Be prepared to wait. A paperback can make a wait in the bank line almost pleasant
- Relax your standards. The world will not end if you have to change the sheets on Sunday instead of Saturday, or mow the lawn next weekend instead of this weekend
- Say "no!" to activities, projects etc that you do not have the time or energy for
- Learn to delegate tasks to capable others
- Prioritize tasks – put the most important tasks first. Likewise, try to do the task that you fear or dislike at the beginning of the day instead of at the end
- Unplug your phone when you want to relax or take time out
- Take a hot bath (or cool one in summer) to relieve tension
- Exercise at least twice a week
- Get up and stretch periodically if your work requires you to sit long for hours at a time
- Try muscle relaxation therapy, yoga or meditation (or better yet treat yourself to all three)
- Have a massage (or two)

stress, and minimizing your tinnitus disturbance. If you regularly perform muscle relaxation exercises, you might even find these attitudes appearing spontaneously.

Exercise

In many respects, regular exercise is actually a combination of several things that can reduce your stress. It helps you keep healthy, happy, active and relaxed. It can burn up the chemicals that the stress response produces in your body, reduce your physical tension, assist your sleeping, and boost your ability to manage your tinnitus.

If you have not had much exercise in the past year or so, it is a good idea to check up with your doctor first, then gradually build up how much exercise you do. Swimming, brisk sustained walking, cycling and dancing are efficient and enjoyable forms of exercise. Doing these at least twice a week, and sufficiently vigorously to raise a light sweat should keep you in good shape.

Practices such as yoga or Tai Chi, can fulfil your stress management and exercise needs in the one package!

Time Management

If you feel like you are always rushed, yet never get to complete what you set out to do, then it could be the opposite problem to keeping occupied. Inefficient use of time can be a significant source of stress. It also could be contributing to a reduced ability to cope with your tinnitus, as well as achieving what you want.

To combat an inefficient use of time, first start with a daily log of how you spent your waking hours. Do this for at least a week, then look for areas where you might have used time inefficiently, or even procrastinated. Try to work out what else is happening to your days.

The next step is to work out your priorities, and the order you need to tackle them in. Sometimes it is best to start the day with the most procrastination-prone task, such as that phone call you would rather not make. After successfully performing such a task, the other tasks will seem much easier.

Use a diary to list your things to do and appointments. A diary is also very useful for planning ahead. You might find great pleasure in being able to cross out your completed tasks as you go! Try to keep your schedule flexible enough to account for unexpected contingencies. However, it is best to keep in mind that time management is a tool to help, rather than rule you!

The benefits of animals

Several studies have shown that stroking an animal can be both relaxing and gratifying. One person has found that her new kitten has provided her with company, warmth, unqualified love, and its purring covers up her tinnitus! What type of animal you acquire will, of course, depend on your living arrangements. If you already have a pet, spending more

time with it cannot do much harm. Having a pet involves a high degree of commitment so you will need to consider carefully before trying this strategy.

Muscle Relaxation Training

Because excessive stress leaves behind tension in our muscles, it follows that by relieving this tension the mind can then relax. The approach usually involves the progressive tensing and then releasing of each muscle group of the body, while allowing the feeling of relaxation to wash through you. This is a very common technique (see attachment - *Progressive Relaxation Training*), and can be combined

“Successful and happy people tend to respond to stressful situations as a challenge and an opportunity to learn”

with listening to Neuromonics Tinnitus Treatment. It can be very effective and enjoyable after it has been practised a few times.

Meditation

Meditation is one of the most efficient forms of stress management, but some people with tinnitus might find that it could focus their attention on the tinnitus more. Many people with tinnitus find they are able to meditate while using their Neuromonics Processor.

Start with the muscle relaxation exercises first, and practice them in at least a dozen sessions. Once you

have mastered the ability to relax your muscles effectively, you might then want to try meditation, as it has the potential to bring an even greater sense of peace and contentment.

Meditation can take many forms, but essentially involves stilling the mind, and facilitating tranquillity. A common technique is to concentrate on a word, feeling or image until the mind slows right down.

Many classes are available to help you learn to meditate.

Massage

This can indirectly help with your stress level and reduce muscle tension as well as being enjoyable.

Conclusion

Stress management can be such a wonderful aid to keep on top of life, as well as in control of your tinnitus, that it should be an essential part of your tinnitus treatment program. It is almost too good to be true, that it could be so beneficial for you, and yet so pleasant to perform.

For more information about stress disorders contact your Doctor