

# Living with Tinnitus:

## Top Ten Good Faith Suggestions for Conquering Tinnitus and Hyperacusis

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Tinnitus and hyperacusis (abnormal sound sensitivity) are extremely challenging symptoms to address, primarily due to the complexity of the brain. Fortunately, the brain is capable of making new or altered connections even if the ear is permanently damaged. The human body has an amazing ability to heal itself and recover from injury. A patient can challenge the brain to accomplish the seemingly impossible task of neutralizing tinnitus and improving sound tolerance. I hope that this list of suggestions will empower you and help you find renewed hope, control and relief. *It is for educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose or treat any reader's condition.* An established formal patient-doctor relationship is the place to discuss symptoms and possible treatments.

- 1. Consultation.** Seek medical and surgical consultation for pulsatile tinnitus (a whooshing sound in sync with your heart rate). Do the same if you experience a clicking or ticking tinnitus in either a rhythmic or staccato, syncopated fashion. A vascular problem is often the cause. A specialist can usually remedy these problems through medication or surgically correcting ear and brain abnormalities.
- 2. Hearing Aids.** Try one or more hearing aids over the course of three to six months if your hearing test reveals hearing loss, regardless of whether you think you have a hearing problem. Do not give up until you find an amplifier that helps you hear better and reduces your tinnitus. You have a greater than 50 percent probability of obtaining some tinnitus relief with well-vented digital hearing aids. For many, hearing aids can be the closest thing to a cure.

- 3. Sound Therapy.** Ask your doctor about daily broadband sound therapy, which can weaken the relative strength of tinnitus and neutralize it. There is tremendous long-term therapeutic value in associating distressing tinnitus with a harmless, benign sound, such as running water, rain, white or pink noise or other dynamic sources that stimulate low,

middle and high frequencies of the ear and brain. Patients can wear devices in the ear, on a belt, in a pocket or loaded onto a computer, digital music player or hand-held phone. They can set them up in various rooms at home or in the office. There is something for everyone on any budget. See [www.ata.org/for-patients/faqs](http://www.ata.org/for-patients/faqs) (question 6).

- 4. Sound Therapy and Counseling.** Sound therapy works best when used in conjunction with skilled, directive, individual, supportive and activities-related counseling. This approach is time and labor intensive but critical for tinnitus relief. Discuss with your trained tinnitus specialist how and why the various tinnitus therapies work, how the ear and brain communicate and the potential outcomes of the therapy. Understanding these issues may help you comply with treatment and maximize your success.
- 5. Evaluation of Overall Health.** Your body – during sickness and health – is like a competitive race car; it needs periodic precision tune-ups. Conquering tinnitus distress puts high energy demands on your body's cells. Ask, or respectfully demand, that your physician orders routine blood and urine tests for a comprehensive understanding of your health. Also, check your nutritional and hormonal levels. A well-balanced diet, regular exercise and balanced nutritional supplements optimized for your particular health needs are all important to keeping your ears, brain, heart, immune system and body healthy. This precision tune-up approach may require assistance from other health and alternative medicine professionals.



The neurology of aging is challenging and best addressed with a holistic medical approach.

**6. Sleep Studies.** Undergo a sleep study if snoring, fatigue, daytime sleepiness or weight is an issue. Many patients report louder tinnitus after a nap or a poor night's sleep. Worse yet, many patients have not enjoyed a night of rejuvenating sleep for years! Sleeping pills are not ideal; they may prevent deep sleep and mask underlying sleep disorders. A dual nighttime sleep study is best – night one for diagnostics and night two for determining effective therapeutic devices. Untreated obstructive sleep apnea increases the risk for heart attack and stroke. Do not delay. Good sleep is extremely important.

**7. Physical Therapy.** Seek physical therapy for your jaw, neck and shoulders when indicated. Some people report tinnitus for the first time after sustaining a whiplash injury. Physical therapy can help reduce neck and shoulder muscle tone imbalances and possibly reduce tinnitus loudness. Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders are common; many patients who grind their teeth at night, or have jaw clicking, popping, pain and limitations in motion, experience fluctuations of tinnitus loudness. Nerves carrying information from the jaw, head and neck can send signals to the hearing center in the brainstem. This increases or decreases tinnitus loudness during a particular muscle contraction, which physical therapy and/or oral splinting may improve. Some patients have reported tinnitus after undergoing forceful, rapid neck manipulations. Gentle chiropractic manipulations are preferred.

**8. An Active Brain.** Keep your brain active with different types of activities, for example: speaking foreign languages, mathematics, puzzles, reading, writing, singing, social interaction, new adventures, outdoor activities or pursuing a passion. Tinnitus perception usually diminishes as one's surrounding space enlarges. So get out there. Exercising outdoors and the sounds of nature can be very good for the body and mind – plus afford tinnitus relief.

**9. Ear Protection.** Use appropriate, well-fitted ear protection. However, *do not overprotect* your ears all day long – this can worsen hyperacusis. Try to reduce unwanted noise: 1) replace your

noisy hair dryer with a quieter one; 2) have your air conditioning and heating systems cleaned and serviced; 3) put felt pads on all cabinet doors; 4) upgrade your TV speakers for better clarity at a lower volume; 5) pay attention to the acoustics in your home; 6) turn down your cell phone volume; and 7) be very careful around live bands, weddings, sporting events, outdoor festivals, fireworks, hunting expeditions and even MRI scans and certain audiology tests.

## 10. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Seek cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) if you are motivated to tackle your tinnitus intellectually and you feel emotionally well balanced. This type of therapy challenges distorted thoughts about tinnitus. Patients gain insight into over 20 different ways their minds might catastrophically view a particular problem. They then learn how to substitute accurate therapeutic thoughts to calm their tinnitus perception. See the National Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapists (NACBT) online roster of certified therapists at [www.nacbt.org/searchfortherapists.asp](http://www.nacbt.org/searchfortherapists.asp).

**11. Medication.** Consider medication only as a last resort, once you've tried hearing aids, physical therapy, nutrition, diet, lifestyle modification and sleep interventions. Medications have no nutritional value; can deplete the body of nutrients; are often loaded with side effects; and have the potential for drug dependency and drug tolerance. They can be a crutch that prevents you from really knowing whether habituating to your tinnitus is possible. For those who do require medication, a discussion with your tinnitus specialist about risks, benefits and alternatives is essential.

If one approach does not work for you, another just might **in time**. Do not give up on the power of your brain and nerves to make new connections necessary to overcome tinnitus distress. With appropriate counseling and sound therapy, the meaning of tinnitus can be neutralized and the brain stops constantly monitoring the tinnitus. Lifestyle changes plus balanced dietary and nutritional support can offer additional health benefits.



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**Do not be discouraged; countless people overcome physical and mental adversity to accomplish amazing goals.**



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As your stress response to the tinnitus ceases to fire excessively, mood and sleep will improve. Ultimately, your brain creates the connections necessary to focus on more important incoming signals, even if the tinnitus loudness does not change. Resuming certain activities may be possible and various mental processes may work more efficiently. ☺☺☺

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