

Mindfulness for Tinnitus *(from the TSG December meeting with Robert Black, Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind)*

Mindfulness is about paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. By taking each of these aspects in turn, we can learn how this technique might be useful in managing tinnitus.

Paying attention...on purpose

As we have learnt from previous speakers at the TSG, one of the most important parts of tinnitus management is learning to take control of our thoughts. Given free reign, our minds will wander all over the place, and often to things that are not helpful, such as ruminating on tinnitus. Mindfulness helps to build the 'muscle' that is used to 'pull' our thoughts back, by asking us to choose where we put our attention. An example of this within a 'mindful' exercise might be to look really carefully at a leaf - to examine the colours, the shape, the feel of it - and every time our mind wanders from this task, we need to bring it back to focussing on the leaf. Over time, this technique can be used to bring thoughts back from focussing on tinnitus to paying attention to something else.

Paying attention...in the present moment

We can rush through the day 'getting things done' almost on autopilot. We can eat our meals without really noticing the tastes and textures of the food; drive to the shops without thinking about the route, and spend time planning ahead or regretting the past rather than noticing what is happening 'in the moment'. Living daily life at a frenetic pace, or scattering your attention over a number of activities simultaneously can have a negative impact on your health. It engages the 'fight or flight' area of the brain, and this in turn leads us to experience stress, tiredness and anxiety. As you will probably be aware, high stress levels are one tinnitus 'trigger' for many people. Mindfulness requires us to try and focus just on what is happening at that moment. For example, you may be experiencing tinnitus at the same time as enjoying a tasty home-cooked meal, or taking a walk in the sun. As you practice mindfulness, you will become aware of smaller things too - like your breathing, or the sensation of being sat in a chair. Staying in the 'present moment' helps to carve out discrete experiences to enjoy and appreciate, rather than seeing the whole day as a stressful or difficult time.

Paying attention...non-judgementally

We are often very quick to attach a judgement to a feeling or experience. More often than not, this judgement will be negative, for example 'it's not fair' or 'I've done that wrong'. Mindfulness encourages us to notice what is happening in a given moment from an objective point of view.

Regarding tinnitus, this could mean trying to describe the noise you hear, and to be curious about it, rather than instantly making a judgement that the noise is 'bad'. Is the noise loud or soft? Grating or fuzzy? High or low pitched? Does it remind you of anything? Experiencing tinnitus in this way takes practise and commitment, but removing the judgement from the experience will allow you to treat the tinnitus as less of a threat and more of a general 'background noise'.

You can find out more about mindfulness by looking at these websites:

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/mindfulness.aspx>
- bemindful.co.uk

Or by contacting Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind on 01603 432457.

Here is an example of a simple mindfulness exercise, taken from www.pocketmindfulness.com :

Touch Points

This exercise is designed to make us appreciate our lives by slowing the pace down, coming into purer awareness and resting in the moment for a while.

Think of something that happens every day more than once, something you take for granted, like opening a door for example. At the very moment you touch the door knob to open the door, allow yourself to be completely mindful of where you are, how you feel and what you are doing. Similarly, the moment you open your computer to start work, take a moment to appreciate the hands that let you do this, and the brain that will help you use the computer.

The cues don't have to be physical ones. It could be that every time you think something negative you take a mindful moment to release the negative thought, or it could be that every time you smell food you take a mindful moment to rest in the appreciation of having food to eat.

Choose a touch point that resonates with you today. Instead of going through the motions on auto-pilot, stop and stay in the moment for a while and rest in the awareness of this daily activity.

Date for your Diary

Tinnitus Awareness Week will be 2-8th February 2015 this year. Why not take the opportunity to find out more about the help and support available for tinnitus? The British Tinnitus Association is a good place to start: www.tinnitus.org.uk

Next TSG Meeting

Relaxation and stress management for people with tinnitus

Thursday 12 February, 6:30pm-8:00pm

This talk will provide helpful advice and techniques on relaxation and stress management for people with tinnitus. Presented by Claire Gatenby, Chief Hearing Therapist from the Audiology Department of the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital. Limited spaces available for this clinic session - please contact the NDA to book a place.