

## **SOUND AS THERAPY**

The use of sound in various forms is *one of the three main therapies* for controlling the impact of tinnitus on the nervous system. The others are *relaxation* and *medication*, discussed in the Bulletins of the Association.)

No single approach suits everyone. Sometimes a *combination* of therapies is needed. Don't confine your search for help to one therapy only!

Tinnitus Re-Training is the best known and most effective of several 'sound therapies'. However, a limitation for many people is the fact that it is *not an insured medical service*, and the instruments required ('sound generators') are *not subsidized* by provincial Assistive Devices Programmes.

*"Sound generators"* (formerly called "maskers") are small electronic devices, held in or behind the ear by a custom mould. They emit a generalized, broad band of sound, a kind of soft 'air conditioner' *whoosh*. They are much less complex than hearing aids, with only on-off and volume controls. An important feature is an *open earmould* *that allows external sound to be heard*.

The original method of using *sound as therapy*, was pioneered by Jack Vernon, PhD. of Portland Oregon. It involved raising the volume so that the sound of the instrument actually *covered over* or '*masked*' the tinnitus. Some favourable results were achieved, but the level of sound required quickly became tiresome and uncomfortable for most people.

In the late 1980's Dr. Jonathan Hazell worked with audiologists at the Tinnitus and Hyperacusis Centre in London, England, to improve the effectiveness of this form of treatment. *In participants were instructed to set the sound at various levels, to determine which they found most acceptable on a continuing basis.*

Response showed that *a level closely matching that of the tinnitus* offered the greatest degree of relief. Wearing the 'sound generators' for from 6 to 8 hours a day was found in many cases to gradually make the tinnitus less intrusive and disturbing.

**This therapy is called 'Tinnitus Re-Training' since it appears to slowly adapt the brain to be less aware of subjective sounds.**

(*'White noise'* is considered by the renowned Canadian pain researcher, Ronald Melzack, to have a *calming, anaesthetizing* effect on *the deepest levels of the nervous system*.)

Reducing the impact of tinnitus is always a gradual process, and this applies to the use of a 'generator'. Substantial improvement may take a matter of months to be noticed..

'Sound generators' can be ordered through any *audiologist* or *hearing aid dispenser*. A trial period of six weeks is usual. A major barrier to their widespread use is cost, about \$2200 a pair.

A single generator is sometimes enough, though for the best chance of good results, two are recommended.)

*Sometimes a hearing aid can perform the function of a generator, since an aid creates its own low level sound.*

The TAC has guidelines on the use of 'generators' as set out by the audidologists who developed this therapy. These are available on request, or as part of our information package.

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