

A photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. The ocean waves are breaking on the left side of the frame. The sand is a light tan color, and there is a large, soft shadow cast across it from the right. In the foreground, there is a patch of white foam from a wave that has washed onto the sand.

# M & M

Mills & McKinney  
Hearing Practice

# Managing tinnitus

In most cases, tinnitus is an internally generated sound, that the auditory system has tuned into by mistake. Tinnitus management aims to help the auditory system to filter tinnitus out.

However, it is always important to check that tinnitus is not a symptom of a medical condition, and we will always refer you on to one of our expert medical colleagues for further investigations where necessary.

## Approaches to tinnitus management

There **are** many approaches to tinnitus management, and **numerous** mainstream and alternative therapies have been tried. It is likely that there are many different types of tinnitus lumped together under the term “**tinnitus**”, so whilst alternative therapies that promote relaxation **might** work better for individuals whose tinnitus is mainly stress related, they don't do much to manage the effects of hearing loss and so on.

Scientific reviews looking a wide range of studies of tinnitus treatment suggests that a **combination** of managing hearing, sound therapy and psychological management is most effective. The term psychological management here is used to include basic information giving about tinnitus, counselling, and **more intensive strategies** such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

Our tinnitus management programme is therefore carefully tailored to your needs.

## Ingredients for our perfect tinnitus management recipe

There are then several key management ingredients:

- If you have a hearing loss we always recommend fitting appropriate hearing aids, or optimizing your existing hearing aids
- We discuss sound therapy options with you. This may consist of either wearable or environmental sound generators.
- We work with you to identify what effect the tinnitus is having on you, and what thoughts, beliefs and concerns you have about it
- We then start to break these down, allowing you to start habituating to your tinnitus
- Relaxation techniques are used where necessary

Tinnitus management is very much a “whole person” approach – ignoring emotional state and general health issues really isn’t helpful.

## Our brains are amazing filterers of sound

A **typical** morning in my house involves listening to the radio whilst getting teenagers ready for school – oh and organizing breakfasts too.

Quite often I couldn’t tell you what was on the radio, but if music that I liked, or a piece of information that I was interested in came on, I can switch my attention to it.

My brain is always scanning the soundscape and tuning in to what I have trained it that I want to hear. Our brains use a complex sound filtering system to do this. These filters are influenced by parts of the brain that manage our emotional response and alertness to sound.

This **wonderful** system is there to keep us safe and happy. So, anything that we really love, or really hate, or perceive as a threat to our life or life quality will pass through the sound filters even if it is very soft, or only partially heard.

## The aim of tinnitus management is habituation

Our brains are **amazing!** When you walk down a street, or go for a stroll in the country, you are surrounded by **millions** of different sounds, sights, smells and physical stimuli. However, you are simply not **aware** of **all** of these – your brain selectively attends to what is important to you and **ignores** what it decides is not. It habituates to unimportant stimuli and tunes in to important ones.

Another example - think about the feeling of your socks or shoes you’re wearing right now. You didn't notice them until I mentioned them – that's because you’ve **habituated** to the feeling – it’s not an important feeling - you don't notice it.

You've **habituated** to that sensation.

Tinnitus therapy teaches you to habituate to tinnitus. To habituate means to learn not to be bothered by or perhaps even notice tinnitus by retraining your brain not to listen to tinnitus – if this happens the tinnitus sound is filtered out before you hear it.

## What stops habituation

If you are worried or concerned about your tinnitus, find it annoying or irritating, your auditory filters will be absolutely expert in picking it up and you will hear it more.

This will stop you habituating to it.



## How can you promote habituation?

If you start to understand why your tinnitus is there some of the anxiety and concern will go, and you won't react so strongly to tinnitus. You can then start to identify and change your thoughts and behaviours towards tinnitus and start to habituate. The vicious circle shown above starts to reverse.



Fitting hearing aids and using sound therapy can help to support this process.

When habituation starts, you will be less troubled by your tinnitus, hear it less and less, find that it is a **meaningless** background sound, and may **even** find that it **disappears completely**.

**Most** people habituate to their tinnitus on their own, but if this is not happening then tinnitus therapy is **extremely** effective – the science backs that up.

## Your management journey starts here

We provide tinnitus management for both adults and children. We ask that you see your GP or other medical specialist prior to arranging an appointment with us in order to exclude any conditions that need medical or surgical management.

The first step is to identify what is going on. We take a careful case history before checking your hearing. It is really important for us to understand what effect the tinnitus is having on you, how it makes you feel, and if you are suffering from any consequences such as anxiety or depression. We also ask about the effects of tinnitus on your life quality, including on your sleep.

We then discuss our findings with you, with the aim of giving you a clear understanding of what is, and as importantly, what is not, the problem.

## What happens next

This may be enough, however for troublesome tinnitus we then arrange a series of 5 - 6 appointments over a six-month period, longer term reviews thereafter as necessary.

These can be face to face or online.

Management tends to consist of frequent initial sessions, followed by an increasing length of time between appointments. The aim is to give you a toolbox that can be used at home, rather than relying just on management sessions.

## Further information

You will find further information [Tinnitus management](#) in our services section. [You may also find our other Resources helpful.](#)

The British Tinnitus Association also has some useful information. You can find this at <https://www.tinnitus.org.uk>

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