

# TINNITUS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP & DISCUSSION: **CONTENT**

## **1: ONLY A MINORITY ARE BOTHERED BY THEIR TINNITUS**

### *EXCERPT*

*In 2004 Robert Dobie, a prominent researcher in audiology and hearing loss, presented the “tinnitus pyramid”, conceptualising how tinnitus affects people differently.*

*According to this study we learn that:*

- *10-15% of all adults develop tinnitus.*
- *80% of these are not bothered by their tinnitus*
- *The remaining 20% find their tinnitus bothersome, ranging from mild, moderate to severe. These people are generally struggling from time to time.*
- *The top 1-2% have debilitating tinnitus, possibly ruining their quality of life.*

**DISCUSSION:** How can we interpret this – and how can these facts help us?

## **2: EVERYONE CAN SEE IMPROVEMENT**

### *EXERPTS*

*The doom-and-gloom narrative that people with bothersome tinnitus often latch on to, is an outdated notion that is unfortunately difficult to shake off. It makes it hard to believe in improvement - and imagining a life with the constant disturbance in your ears can be very demoralising. The fact that everyone can see improvement or learn to disregard the sound, could contribute much needed hope to those who are struggling with their tinnitus. The belief that things can improve makes it easier to steer clear of unhelpful behaviours.*

**DISCUSSION:** a lot of people fear they will never see improvement - but I've done a lot of research in the time I've written this book, and everywhere the consensus is that everyone has the capacity to improve. What can we do to hang on to this belief?

## **3: PUT TOGETHER A TINNITUS MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT**

### *EXCERPT*

*A toolkit is a personal set of resources, abilities, or skills that enables you to manage your tinnitus successfully.*

*Your toolkit will offer a positive and sustainable foundation for handling your tinnitus without external help. Instead of facing long waiting times or limited options within the health care system, you can turn to your own knowledge base for help – potentially a very liberating experience which can clear the route ahead towards a life that is not defined by tinnitus.*

DISCUSSION: We are often told to hang on to our tinnitus management toolkits. But where do we learn how to get hold of one or how to put one together?

#### **4: IMPROVEMENT IS NEVER LINEAR**

##### *EXCERPT*

*One thing people striving to habituate often ask themselves is, “how does improvement come about and how does it show itself?” It’s a tricky question to answer, as everyone’s experience is different - but what everyone has in common is the nonlinear journey. The conception of gradual and stable day by day improvement doesn’t apply to tinnitus – or to most other healing processes for that matter. The “two steps ahead, one step back – again and again” scenario is very descriptive of the process, and it is very important to appreciate and understand this fact. But the scenario also points out constant improvement, which is there, even if it appears unclear at times.*

DISCUSSION: The habituation process keeps on being disrupted by enhanced tinnitus perception or spikes. It can be very unsettling and disruptive, and some people stop trusting in improvement. How can we strengthen our resolve to hang on to the process on a bad day?

#### **5: YOUR BRAIN CAN DEAL WITH NOISE**

##### *EXCERPT*

*Why is it possible to walk along a busy road without even noticing the traffic or fall asleep during a flight with the jet engines roaring just a couple of metres away? As these sounds are completely normal and reasonable to us, we don’t fear them – and as we don’t fear them the brain remains calm and dismisses them as irrelevant. And if our mind is otherwise engaged, which it is most of the time, we don’t even notice them.*

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*The fact that everyone has the capacity to completely disregard all kinds of sounds, is something people with tinnitus can cultivate. When we realise that we’re able to persuade the brain that the tinnitus sound isn’t more dangerous than any of the other sounds we come across on a daily basis, we find ourselves in a very different place! This enables us to find a new status quo in our lives, where our tinnitus becomes more of a natural part of ourselves – to some, almost like they had been born with it.*

DISCUSSION: We have this amazing ability to tolerate sounds – as long as they are not perceived as a threat. What can we do to cultivate this capacity in our pursuit to manage our tinnitus?

## 6: KEEP GOING

### EXCERPT

*The belief that your tinnitus will stop you from leading a normal life, is a well ingrained misconception many people latch on to. But, at the end of the day, it is something you are in a position to do something about and given time you will realise that you'll be able to do most things you used to do. The object is to muster all your motivation and willpower to keep going. If you manage to do that successfully, you will come to realise that it isn't your tinnitus stopping you from doing things – it's you!*

**DISCUSSION:** This can be a rather provocative thing to say – but to what extent can we empower ourselves to take charge and avoid being passive?

## 7: MOST OF THE TIME WE DON'T NOTICE OUR TINNITUS

### EXCERPTS

*It's commonly believed that bothersome tinnitus causes constant discomfort, but in fact, most of the time we don't notice it. Even on a "bad" day, with perceived permanent intrusion, tinnitus awareness comes and goes. The reason we've experienced the disturbance as constant is down to a psychological phenomenon referred to as negative memory bias.*

*Negative memory bias is the tendency to register and remember negative information more readily than neutral or positive experiences, thus leading to a distorted sense of reality. As the tinnitus sound is often perceived as unpleasant and threatening, we are prone to remember this to a greater degree than periods when our tinnitus goes unnoticed. The consequence is that we are often unaware of the time we haven't heard our tinnitus, which makes it difficult to appreciate improvement.*

**DISCUSSION:** Many are unaware of this phenomenon but learning to appreciate the periods when we're unaware of our tinnitus can be a very helpful in our pursuit to habituate. Do you believe this could be a helpful approach?

## 8: THINGS ARE CONSTANTLY CHANGING

*Mindfulness has become a popular practice globally, as it alleviates modern day stress related issues. In this chapter we have looked at mindful impermanence for those with tinnitus. The principle of constant change can offer helpful reflections for those who fear lifelong suffering, but some might argue that the natural flow of things also means things could get worse. Impermanence is indeed known to be a double-edged sword, but the key element is the application of helpful behaviours, such as stress avoidance, good sleep quality, exercise and fostering a hopeful attitude, which will inevitably boost your pursuit to habituate.*

DISCUSSION: Everything keeps on changing, things get better – things get worse. We know that! With regards to tinnitus, helpful behaviours are likely to improve our situation positively, which actually means we're in a position to influence the direction we're going in. Is this an approach you think you can cultivate?

## 9: AVOID ONLINE SEARCHES

### EXCERPT

*Virtually everyone who develops tinnitus looks for information and solutions online. Learning what tinnitus is about is pretty much straightforward, but when you want to explore what actions to take, it gets more complicated. All relevant information is a few mouse-clicks away, but in a culture of “fake news”, whether you're interested in politics, celebrity scandals, football transfers or trying to figure out what to do about your tinnitus, it's hard to find information you know you can trust.*

*This is a huge problem! As the internet is the main international information network, it has the potential to be a great asset - but must be approached with a fair bit of scepticism. There is a lot of helpful and credible information available, but the number of misleading suggestions can be very confusing.*

DISCUSSION: The internet is an endless source of information – but unfortunately also misleading and disruptive. People who are trying to habituate are often lured into examining the web for quicker solutions. How can we learn to use the internet in a safe and helpful way?

## 10: SILVER LININGS

*People sometimes ask me if my life would have been better had I not developed tinnitus. It's impossible to know, of course. It would have been different, no doubt, but I don't believe it would have been better. Overcoming tinnitus has been an educational process - I've learnt that life can knock the stuffing out of you at times, but I've also learnt there is a way back. The resilience I built from manoeuvring past these challenging obstacles has served me well at other trying times of my life.*

DISCUSSION: Is this development something you could see happening to you?

