

Mindfulness for Tinnitus Relief

By Ann Friedman, PhD, and Sara Nagel, AuD

Individuals with tinnitus may develop feelings of frustration, depression, anxiety, fear, despair, sadness, and grief. Thoughts like “Why is this happening to me?” “Will I get through this night?” “Will it get worse and become unbearable?” are not uncommon. While tinnitus is not dangerous, your brain may perceive that it is under threat. Negative thoughts and feelings add additional stress, causing headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, insomnia, irritability, an upset stomach, or inability to concentrate.

Mindfulness—a training of the mind to be present in the here and now with openness, curiosity, and kindness—can help reduce tinnitus symptoms and improve one’s quality of life. You can learn to address your tinnitus with patience and acceptance by following these mindfulness tips:

Get curious about your experience. Observe the sound of your tinnitus for a period of time or at various times throughout the day. Does the sound change? Does it become louder, softer, higher- or lower-pitched, intermittent, or continuous? Does it sometimes sound like cicadas and later a buzzer? Noticing change can help. Each experience changes moment by moment even though we sometimes think it stays the same. Thinking that something unpleasant is unchanging makes it harder to deal with.

Don’t resist this human experience. The things that we resist tend to persist and enlarge. If you focus on the pain and making it disappear, it may adversely become louder and more irritating. Remind yourself that this is just an experience. Befriend the experience as best you can. You can even bring some humor by giving it a nickname, like you would a longtime friend.

Notice what your mind is telling you. Mindfulness asks us to question our thoughts. What our mind tells us may not always be true or helpful. For example, a man noticed his mind telling him that his tinnitus was unbearable. After exploring this experience, he observed that his tinnitus sometimes reminded him of holding a seashell to his ear—it was not always pleasant, but it was not unbearable. Tinnitus sufferers often look for their tinnitus the moment they wake up, anticipating that it will give them a bad day, but this doesn’t always have to be the case.

Name it to tame it. Acknowledging your feelings, including sadness or anger, can help calm the brain. By doing so,



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you won’t displace your feelings and become frustrated with someone or something else.

Find reasons to be grateful in the moment. When frustrated, your focus narrows. Broaden it by taking a walk and enjoying the sight of the sky, trees, children playing, birds, colors of cars, or interesting architecture. See the beauty of the moment to refresh your spirit. Reaching out to someone who is also struggling can switch the focus off yourself. Bringing someone else joy can make you feel helpful and happy.

Remember that you are not alone. Millions of people across the planet share your experience of pain—it may not be from tinnitus but a pain of another sort.

Be kind to yourself. Self-criticism in any situation is not helpful. Berating yourself for causing your tinnitus brings feelings of guilt and shame. Instead, bring kindness and compassion to yourself. Speak to yourself as you would to a good friend, and say, for example, “Wow, this is hard. May I find ease in the day,” “May I accept myself as doing the best I can,” or “May I be gentle with myself and listen to my needs.”

Practice meditation. Focused awareness can help relax the body and stabilize the mind. Sit with a relaxed posture, feet flat on the floor, and hands relaxed on your lap. Breathe deeply for a minute or two, then focus on a single anchor—it can be your abdomen rising and falling with each breath, the sensation in your hands, the sound of a fan in the room, or anything you choose. When you find your attention wandering, gently redirect your attention back to the anchor. Over time, your ability to divert your attention away from your tinnitus will improve and last for a longer time. Go online to find other helpful resources such as mindfultinnitusrelief.com.

When upset, notice what you might need. Would it help to talk or get a hug? Can you get a massage or take a warm bath? Would a walk or playing with your dog help release tension? How about laughing with your grandchild? Communication, love, connection, and physical tenderness can make your world a kinder, gentler place, even with tinnitus. 



Dr. Friedman, left, is a psychologist and a mindfulness facilitator certified by the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center of the Semel Institute of Neuroscience and Behavioral Medicine. Her Houston-based company, Mindful Being, provides mindfulness training across America. **Dr. Nagel** is the founder of The Center for Audiology in Houston,

TX. She collaborates with Dr. Friedman in providing group mindfulness sessions as part of a holistic treatment plan for patients with tinnitus.