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Tinnitus Does Not Rule Me!

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May I be calm and without fear. Tinnitus does not rule me…

Four months after receiving a cochlear implant, I was stricken with severe tinnitus and hyperacusis. Stricken, the absolute best word: *seriously affected by an undesirable condition or unpleasant feeling.*

It came as the result of acoustic trauma, and it stayed, leaving me to deal with it as best I could.

I'm writing about the vile tinnitus *beast*, because Glynnis Tidball is also writing about it in this issue (although she may be less dramatic about it). Glynnis is my tinnitus/CI audiologist and the few hours I spend with her each year are precious ones. Except, perhaps, for the mapping sessions. I'm sure mine is the longest she has to conduct; we have to pause frequently because my hyperacusis repeatedly spikes, making it difficult for me to discern the beeps. Each time, I use breathing and neck manipulations to bring the sound 'back down' enough before we can proceed.

Last fall, Glynnis introduced me and several other of her patients to an 8-week Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course geared to people dealing with tinnitus. She participated as well. The course was wonderful. Using mindfulness, meditation, and yoga, it built on what I'd learned in a 6-week course called BCalm, to which my family doctor had referred me. Both courses offered strategies for tinnitus sufferers to deal with the stress and anxiety related to chronic tinnitus.



I am now addicted to deep, intentional breathing. And when my day also includes the powerhouse combination of meditation, meaningful exercise, and yoga stretches, the next morning, I notice a sometimes-significant drop in my hyperacusis and an *increase* in clearer hearing. There's science behind this, but I can't tell you what it is. I just know what the results are.

The problem is *sticking with it.* Another day can zoom by before realizing that I haven't made time for meditation or some heart-pumping exercise. Why do we humans do that to ourselves?

But I'm trying to change *sporadic* into *daily.* As I write this, I'm on Day 2 of a self-directed 30 Days of Meditation. No, I have yet meditated this morning because I'm late with getting this article in, but it's next on my to-do list.

May I be calm and without fear.

Because there's no cure or quick fix, people will try almost anything to get rid of their 'T'. So anything on Facebook that aims to cure or dull the noise is up for it. Anything to get rid of this beast, a biting bug we can't shake off.

Drumming the back of the head with fingers. Massage, acupuncture, chiropractic. Asking our dentist to fix the TMJ that we don't have. And gobs of money on various supplements, the common ingredient being "you're a sucker." Wine helps briefly, but marijuana only spikes it. And, for some, hearing aid masking programs are helpful.

A recent Facebook post by a tinnitus sufferer told how, after months of severe anxiety over his tinnitus—*how did this start and what am I going to do*—he realized that the anxiety was *far worse* than the actual tinnitus. As a result, when he dealt with his anxiety, he lived more calmly with his tinnitus.

It helps to identify, or at least be more aware, of our tinnitus triggers. For me, rainy weather is not optimal. Unfortunately, I live in a semi-rainforest. If I'm tired, tinnitus seems worse. Salty snacks are deliciously addictive but seriously not good for head noise. And these days, I can't be around noise because it echoes loudly inside me.

I will be calm and listen to my body.

Courses such as MBSR and BCalm can offer many WOW moments. You realize that just as the bug bite didn't cause your arm to fall off, your head noise hasn't eaten up your brain.

You learn to move your mind to other things, more deserving of your time. You focus on sleeping better, eating delicious food, and engaging in exercise. You take calming breaths, and you meditate, even though *you-can't-believe-you're-actually-doing-this*. The tinnitus is still there, but it's easier to deal with.

When I meditate (which I'm going to do shortly), I breathe deeply and then start talking silently.

May I be calm and without fear.

I hear my head sounds but they do not rule me.

May I show myself kindness – I did not cause the tinnitus.

May I take care of myself

May I be grateful for those who support me, help me, and love me.

May I be happy because tinnitus does not rule me.

May I be calm and without fear.