

Caring for Tinnitus Patients During COVID19

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As Audiologists we know that one thing that can cause tinnitus to get worse for our patients is stress. Nothing is more stressful than being isolated at home in a world of uncertainty. Many of our patients might have lost their jobs due to the COVID19 pandemic or their life has been on hold causing them to miss important events in their life such as being with their children or grandchildren, celebrating anniversaries, birthdays or graduations. Some of our patients might be those essential workers who are going into work everyday with the normal workplace stress being magnified by the COVID19 pandemic.

Although our clinics are closed we can still offer the much needed support to these patients during this difficult time.

Stress & Tinnitus

- Tinnitus can be one of the most distressing disorders or audiological symptoms a patient can face.
- Tinnitus can significantly affect a patient's quality of life.
- Emotional stress can impact the degree of the tinnitus that the patient is suffering with.

Helping Our Patient's Cope with their Tinnitus remotely

Any good treatment plan for tinnitus consists of counselling which is something we can do remotely.

- Counselling may consist of phone calls with the patients to see how they are managing and providing a sounding block for patients to vent their frustrations.
- Counselling could involve using a web camera and an operating platform such as Skype or WebEx to name just a few.
- You also might want to use one of the hearing aid manufacturer's remote care apps to provide counselling. Or you might be communicating via email where you can provide suggestions and tips for coping with tinnitus.
- We can also use the hearing aid manufacturer apps to adjust the patient's hearing aids and with some of the hearing aid manufacturers' remote care apps you can even adjust the patient's tinnitus program.

Information we can be offering to our Patients with Tinnitus

- Talk to your patients about some of the sound therapy apps that are out there to help such as Resound Tinnitus Relief, Widex Zen, Phonak Tinnitus Balance, Sleep Pillow (my favourite), Starkey Relax, Oticon Tinnitus Sound to name only a few.

- If your patient is not tech savvy a sound generator might help, such as Sleep Sound Therapy System, Sound Oasis or Sleep Therapy Pillow.
- Encourage the patient to use their hearing aid app to adjust their tinnitus programs in their hearing aids to help manage their tinnitus
- Encourage your patients to use their hearing aids even if they are home alone. Often times patients feel that since they are alone they don't need to use their hearing aids but we know that by stimulating the auditory system through the use of amplification we can lessen the tinnitus effects.
- Counsel the patients to avoid loud noise and if they are exposed to it, to use hearing protection. Patients might increase their noise exposure by taking up a new hobby or working on some home renovations. Noise exposure can cause tinnitus to increase.
- Encourage your patient to find new ways of coping with stress such as exercise and meditation.
- Encourage your patient to try massage or stretching concentrating on the neck and facial area.
- Discuss with your patient about joining an online support group for those suffering with tinnitus.
- When we are stuck at home we can sometimes get caught going down rabbit holes on the internet. Caution your patients about false claims on the internet about curing tinnitus. Provide your patients with reliable sources about tinnitus such as the British Tinnitus Association (BTA) or the American Tinnitus Association (ATA).
- I encourage my patients to research tinnitus as I find this can lessen the effects of the tinnitus, especially once they understand they are not alone. However, I make sure to provide them with professional organizations (ATA & BTA) so they know the information they are getting is research based.
- Talk to your patient about the importance of sleep. Poor sleep can affect a patient's tinnitus. Encourage your patients to stick to a regular sleep pattern. Have your patients use a sound therapy app, fan, radio or sound generator to help fall asleep and improve their quality of sleep.

Resources for your tinnitus patients:

- American Tinnitus Association <http://www.ata.org>
- British Tinnitus Association <https://www.tinnitus.org.uk>