

## Mike's Journey

When I first had tinnitus, I was at my wit's end, I wasn't sleeping, and when / if I did manage to get to sleep, my sleep was broken and I woke many times during the night. I wasn't eating properly or doing anything that I would normally do. This probably lasted 6 months. I was a walking zombie and extremely anxious as I thought I would never get a proper night's sleep again or that my life would ever return to what it was prior to developing tinnitus.

Looking back; I can understand why I was suffering from anxiety and depression. The lack of sleep and the thought that there is no cure for tinnitus was causing the anxiety and the depression, the sleep deprivation was exacerbating the situation to the extent that I was fast becoming dysfunctional.

As you can imagine, I tried everything possible for that first 6 months to get a good night's sleep. The list is far too long for me to mention everything that I tried. One day, I spent the whole day swimming and biking (this was forced), I went to bed and didn't sleep a wink and I finally went to a Doctor. Looking back I should have gone sooner or in the initial stages. But I, like many people, I didn't want to be on prescription meds.

“Hi Doctor, I know there is absolutely nothing you can do for my tinnitus, BUT, I haven't slept in 6 months (very little sleep, actually). I need a long term mild sleeping aid if you have one. I don't want sleeping pills because I don't want to take something for a week and then be back to square one.”

He put me on a low dose anti-depressant and a low dose anti-anxiety medication. I slept 3 hours straight the first night. By the end of the week I was up to 4 hours straight. The following week 5 hours and so on. The medication along with deep breathing and meditation gave me my sleep back; and I have been sleeping fine ever since.

Getting sufficient sleep (minimum 6-7 hours per night) is your first step in moving towards habituation. You must get 3 or 4 nights in a row of good sleep to start the recovery process. Sleep is definitely the keystone to getting on top of your tinnitus. Speak to your Doctor about suitable medication to make sure you get adequate sleep, this is not a long term prospect, it is just short term so that you can start to learn how to manage your tinnitus.

My next step was getting proper information on how to go about dealing with my condition. My ENT was absolutely useless. There was “only“ a 9 month waiting list to see a tinnitus specialist at Sunnybrook hospital in Toronto. Somehow on the internet I found the Tinnitus Association of Victoria ([www.tinnitus.org.au](http://www.tinnitus.org.au)). The information there is second to none and they always took a positive approach to getting better which they assured would happen (and of course, it did happen). I remember sending off an email with a question and the next day I got a response. I couldn't believe it. I sent off another email and got a very lengthy response to one of my questions. This went on for a while and I cannot tell you how comforting it was to be able to write to one of their counsellors who had tinnitus, who understood what I was going through and for me to get great advice on how to deal with my problem. I will never be able to thank Ian (the counselor who helped me) enough. This help was not only available via email, Ian was happy to hook up via Skype so that we could talk face to face – which we did many times. The research and work done by him and Ross (the other counsellor) really helped me get my life back. Now they have a DVD available which contains the ‘The 4 Keys to Successful Tinnitus Management’. It is a brilliant DVD containing all you need to know about getting on top of your tinnitus. I can look back now and laugh because Ian and I have become good friends, but I must have sounded pretty down and anxious at that time.

I go to a site now and try to help others as I made a vow that if I ever got over this (and believe me there were times I didn't think I ever would ) that I would try to help others as the Tinnitus Association of Victoria helped me. That is what I am doing in this letter.

One of the best pieces of advice I can give would be this... Lead your life the exactly same way you did before you had tinnitus. If you have tinnitus, what can you do? read my previous line. By leading your normal life you are telling brain that tinnitus is a benign sound that will not affect your life in any way – **unless you let it**. Never let tinnitus dictate what you do or do not do in your life. Leading your life the way you always did is a huge help in overcoming the fear that tinnitus can have on you.

Learning to manage your tinnitus takes time, it does not happen overnight, but if you follow the advice on the web page mentioned previously or in the DVD, you will habituate and your life will return to normal. I'll use a story that happened to me. I call this the distraction factor – use it to your advantage. I went to the Boston aquarium, during my time in the building I didn't notice my tinnitus at all and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Between the sights and the sounds, tinnitus didn't affect my visit whatsoever.

You can't be going to aquariums every day, of course not, but what will happen is this, in time you'll be reading about a significant event in the paper and you won't hear your tinnitus, you will be engaged in conversation with your spouse or friends and you won't hear your tinnitus, or you will be engrossed in watching the Olympics and you won't hear your tinnitus. You can see where I am going with this. These times when you are not as aware of your tinnitus will become more frequent and last longer until you will not be aware of your tinnitus for most of the day.

But what about being alone in quiet times.

I wake up a 6:00 a.m. every day and go about my business. At about 1:00 p.m. I go into a room by myself and I read a book (the Bobby Orr story, right now) and have a short restful period. It's my favorite time of the day. A quiet room!!! a book !!! alone with your tinnitus ???

Here's the kicker. I couldn't care less.

Yes. I do hear my tinnitus during this time, but it does not bother me at all like it used to and it certainly doesn't stop me from reading my book. I've accepted tinnitus as a minor annoyance in my life. It used to distress me, but not anymore.

I don't try any special medicines, I don't even put on any background music anymore. These days tinnitus has no control over my life whatsoever. This will happen with you as well. Maybe anger will cause you to tell your T. to go to H###. Maybe you'll just get bored of having it control you. The next time you think of going on to the internet to look up information about tinnitus or so called cures (there aren't any – so don't waste your money!), I would suggest don't. The less you think about your tinnitus or focus on it the better off you are.

Find someone or a support group that gives good advice. Good positive advice.

Let me summarize an already too long post (and believe me I could go on.)

1. Get a good night's sleep
2. Accept tinnitus as a minor annoyance and try to keep from obsessing about it.
3. Never let tinnitus determine what you do or do not do.
4. Live your life exactly the same way you did before you had tinnitus.
5. Having proper ear protection and a decibel meter is a good idea. I play in a band and with musician's ear plugs I do quite well. Ear plugs for snow blowers and lawn mowers as well.
6. Believe that there is hope and believe in success stories.
7. When you do get better, find someone who has tinnitus and help them out.

8. The Tinnitus Association of Victoria has a wealth of good information. Believe in the information that they give you. Their web site and DVD are first class – [www.tinnitus.org.au](http://www.tinnitus.org.au)
9. Is it possible to lead a full happy productive life with tinnitus? Google celebrities with tinnitus. You'll be surprised how many have it and they all seem good. David Letterman and Paul Schaffer are just 2 of MANY.
10. When I read about people's reactions who are new to tinnitus it is like a mirror image of myself. I know exactly how you feel and I felt the exact same way. Now over time, I've come to manage my tinnitus and it has no effect on my life, never think that you cannot get on top of your tinnitus, with good information and support, you will get there. I'll look forward to the company.