

## TINNITUS – MENSTRUATION AND FLUCTUATING FEMALE HORMONES

I am sharing my experience with adjusting to the sudden onset of tinnitus over the first twelve months. During this time, at age 47, I found it hard to very hard to follow the '4 Keys' without first understanding how fluctuating female hormones can affect the early acceptance of tinnitus. For me, it's 'intrusiveness' fluctuated before, during and after my period. It took me several months to recognise these patterns as normal, relax and not be so distressed or annoyed by them. Over time, I have adjusted to not be bothered by this nearly as much.

Please note that the effect your period will have on tinnitus may be different. From my own personal experience, I consistently noticed a pattern whereby several days prior to the onset of my period, my tinnitus levels would ramp up quite noticeably and remain at that level. It was as though someone had turned the volume intensity up by several notches. Towards the last day of my period and for the days subsequent, my tinnitus seems to settle down and then I would start to feel better within myself. It was from these days onwards, when my tinnitus had settled, along with my hormones (and fragility), I could focus on the 4 keys and basically get back to feeling more in control again.

From my experience, I found the most fragile period was in the pre-menstrual stage when most women usually feel flat emotionally and a little down. I personally found that the combination of being pre-menstrual and caught up in dread about tinnitus, really got me depressed. Before developing tinnitus, I was a happy and positive person, so feeling so incredibly low for weeks at a time was a new experience for me. I didn't know where to put myself initially. Now, I recognise this to be perfectly normal for new sufferers but at the time it felt incredibly isolating. In this state I would really spiral into a dark hole and catastrophise my situation. Of course, tinnitus seems the worst when all is quiet and when you are trying to sleep.

Please know that you are totally normal to feel this way. Instead of fighting your tinnitus and hating it with a passion, my advice is that you need to slowly get used to this head noise, accept it, focus on the 4 keys and just take control and get on with life. It does get easier with time, but it is not something you should focus on at all, or worry about how long it will take you before you start to feel better. I've asked many people who have tinnitus and their 'adjustment phase' to accepting tinnitus by essentially adopting the 4 keys can be as short as 4-6 months or much longer.

Whatever the timeframe, don't give up because you will adjust and the worse you will see your tinnitus into the future is a mild annoyance and not something you will be bothered by. Over this transition period, where the timeframe is different for everyone, you will reach a stage when you will not be worried by your tinnitus. To give you an idea, one sufferer told me that their tinnitus bothers them no more than the hairs on their back! This is incredible to fathom when you are new to tinnitus. However, I came to realise that the mind is very powerful, and it takes time for it to stop seeing tinnitus as a threat, if you train it to relax and ignore it, despite your fluctuating hormones.

Things that helped me through my fragile periods:

1. Sitting in a bath with the water running. Water masks the sound of tinnitus buzzing perfectly (in my case)
2. Placing yourself in a place where there is enough background noise to take your focus of your tinnitus

3. Doing anything that makes you relax: mine was escaping to a good book. I read lots to distract myself.
4. Throughout my pre-menstrual days, I used mild sleeping tablets and natural remedies to help me get a good night's sleep. Sleep is essential to your recovery.
5. Realise that there are so many other people who have had tinnitus all their lives and are perfectly fine and happy. This will be you one day. It is just an adjustment.

Things that delayed my recovery were:

1. Focussing and measuring my tinnitus on a daily basis initially. There is no point – it just reinforces to your brain that tinnitus is a threat.
2. Looking for miracle cures on the internet and reading horror stories of sufferers whose lives are hell as a result of tinnitus.
3. Mulling over what have caused my tinnitus in the first place, as scientists and specialists still do not understand what the exact triggers are.
4. Refusing to accept tinnitus as my new normal. Accepting that tinnitus, relative to developing cancer or other more serious conditions, isn't nearly as bad. Some perspective helps.

There is no scientific evidence that conclusively understands the interplay between tinnitus and changing oestrogen and progesterone but research in the last decade has increased our awareness of hormones acting on the central and peripheral nerves.

According to two studies I found ([this one](#) and [this one](#)), it's believed that fluid retention or blood flow changes in the inner ear as a result of hormone fluctuations during the premenstrual phase may result in a higher likelihood of tinnitus.

For some women, like me, the menstrual cycle does play a significant part in fluctuating my tinnitus severity. However, as you slowly come to accept your tinnitus over time, this will not worry you.

Please be mindful that adjusting to your tinnitus during you're your pre-menstrual period may be more challenging and be aware of the signs that you may feel more depressed during these times. Be kind on yourself as it will become easier.