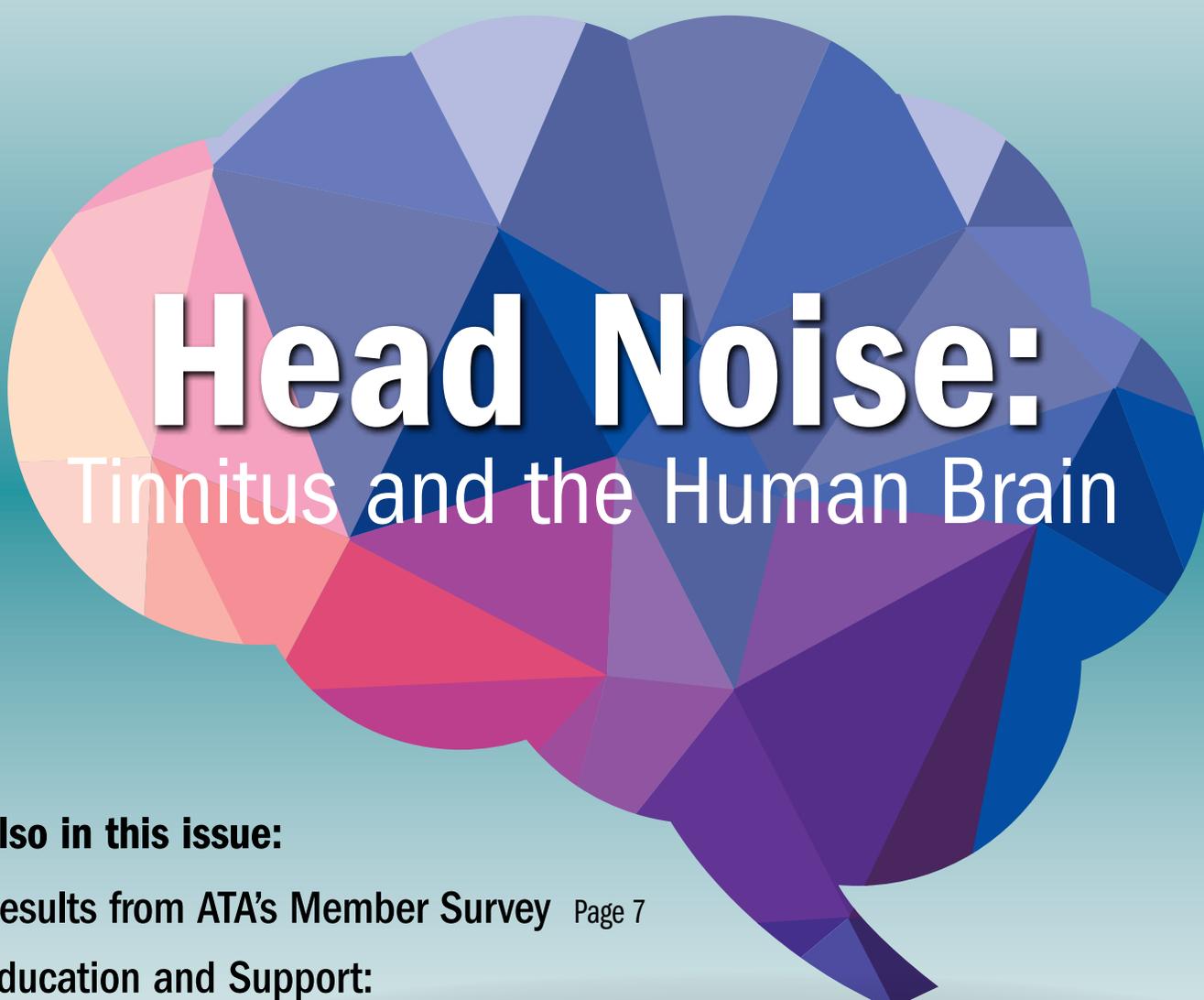


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COMMITTED TO A CURE

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Head Noise: Tinnitus and the Human Brain

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The Bottom Line: Find Relief



By Saul Tave

My story of tinnitus—and finding relief—was a circuitous journey. It didn't begin directly with tinnitus symptoms, but rather with symptoms of hyperacusis, an oversensitivity to certain frequencies and volumes of sound.

My tinnitus and hyperacusis symptoms developed gradually, over a period of a few years. They came on so slowly that I don't even remember exactly when they began. My symptoms progressively got worse, but I ignored the problem. I didn't pay much attention or take action until my symptoms became truly annoying and burdensome.

The first symptom that really bothered me was a physically painful reaction to specific sounds, particularly high-volume, high-frequency "burst" noises. Amplified sounds, like those at a party or performance, were also painful. The loudness would make me feel belligerent; the frustration in my chest just soared.

Sound sensitivity affected my social interaction with friends, too. If one of my friends talked excitedly about something, the increased volume and pitch in his or her voice caused pain; if someone simply emphasized a point with a quick burst of extra volume, I'd feel like I was getting hit in the head with a hammer. I started carrying earplugs and used them almost all the time to protect myself. Wearing earplugs helped a little, but also made it difficult to hear and follow conversations.

Even my wife's voice became painful to me. I was constantly asking her to be quiet, and found myself asking her to "shoosh" frequently. Happily married for more than 52 years, we wanted to keep it going—and knew that a lot of "shooshing" isn't good for a marriage! We were both frustrated.

During all this, I had tinnitus symptoms that were increasingly annoying and uncomfortable. My tinnitus was a monotonous whistling noise that was just always there.

Finding relief

It was my wife who prompted me to seek help. I scheduled an appointment with an otolaryngologist (ENT) who was also a friend and associate. My primary care physician had told me that nothing could be done about my tinnitus and that I needed to "just live with it." Fortunately, the ENT worked in a large clinic, which also had an audiologist on staff. I consulted this audiologist and she immediately diagnosed both my tinnitus and my hyperacusis. She helped measure the frequencies and decibels that were causing the pain. She also told me about existing management techniques for tinnitus and hyperacusis, including the Neuromonics devices. I was referred to a local tinnitus specialist, Patricia Harrington, Au.D., for follow-up treatment.

With that referral, I made an appointment with Dr. Harrington. Her initial diagnosis mirrored that of the audiologist at the ENT's office. With both hyperacusis and tinnitus symptoms, she was confident that one of the Neuromonics devices could offer me relief. I was initially worried about the price, but I was assured that it was an affordable option. I was even allowed to try out one of the devices, at no charge, for a weekend.

The Neuromonics device is a compact and easy-to-use product, which looks and functions much like a regular portable music player—a tiny box with attached earphones.

Dr. Harrington explained that the system works by combining relaxing music with barely perceptible customized sounds that stimulate the brain and help manage tinnitus. She chose one of three pre-programmed profiles to find the setting that provided the greatest degree of relief for my particular symptoms. I just had to press "play."

The results were almost immediate. It was amazing how quickly the Neuromonics device worked. In a short period of just a few days, I was able to notice that my wife's voice was no longer painful. Within two to three weeks, I had almost no pain.



Saul Tave, of Largo, Florida, and his wife. After only a two or three weeks of use, the Neuromonics device eliminated most of his pain.

My life today

My life today is wonderful. I'm still sensitive to noise, but it's no longer painful. I wear earplugs at the theater, but it's because I don't like loud noise – not because I'm trying to avoid pain.

I enjoy social interactions so much more. My wife and I spend time with good friends, one of whom happens to have a very loud laugh. Her laughter used to be painful. Now, it's not a problem. It is once again delightful to be around happy, laughing, excited and positive people. That's a wonderful thing.

Perhaps most importantly, I enjoy the sound of my wife's voice again. And she likes not being "shooshed" all the time!

I use the Neuromonics device every day for a few hours. It's a no-brainer that has really helped my symptoms. Most days, I have several hours during which I

don't hear any ringing or buzzing. While my tinnitus is still present when I wake up in the morning, by afternoon, I often don't notice it at all. I sometimes have to concentrate very hard to perceive my tinnitus at all... but why would I do that!?!

My advice

I know many other people who suffer from tinnitus and hyperacusis. To those people, I always share the two following pieces of advice.

My first piece of advice is to protect their hearing when they can. I have long done woodworking as a hobby and many of the tools I used made loud and high-pitched noises. I never bothered with ear protection, which might have been a cause of my problems. I'd encourage everyone to make sure they use ear protection if they spend any time around loud noises.

The second piece of advice I tell those suffering from tinnitus is that you don't have to just live with it. There is more than hope; there are devices that really do work and can make a huge difference in your life. Many of my friends with tinnitus are reluctant to take the steps that may help them—even after I tell them about my experience. This is frustrating, because I know how much more I am enjoying life after getting help. The Neuromonics system is working for me. Other products or treatments may work for others. The bottom line is that there are options that provide relief from tinnitus and hyperacusis.

Editor's Note: Saul's story is a personal anecdote of one patient's experience with Neuromonics. ATA does not endorse or recommend any tinnitus products or treatments.



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