

WHY TINNITUS AND POOR SLEEP ARE CONNECTED

Find the 7 steps for blissful sleep



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Why Tinnitus & Poor Sleep Are Connected
Find the 7 steps you can take for blissful sleep

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Who is this guide designed for?

Those who have tinnitus and are desperate for a good night's sleep!

Now everyone will have occasional nights when they struggle getting to sleep or wake up feeling as if they have been awake most of the night. But if you have tinnitus your chances of suffering from poor sleep are much higher.

When we talk to members of Tinnitus Tunes about a third list "poor sleep quality" as their major challenge and according to the British Tinnitus Association up to 70% of people attending tinnitus clinics suffer from sleeping difficulties.

So you are not alone, but that is probably not a great comfort. That is why this guide is designed to give you:

- 7 simple action steps you can take yourself to fall asleep faster, stay asleep and wake up refreshed instead of exhausted.
- A breakthrough to tackle and change your tinnitus (empower you to hit the cause as well as the symptoms).
- How to attack another potential underlying cause of your sleep difficulties and show you how to move to a new "calmer future".
- Access to ongoing support and information sources.

I hope you will not mind if I drop in some quotes along the way on our journey together:

"A good laugh and a long sleep are the two best cures for anything"

So what is the link between Tinnitus & Sleep difficulties?

Another way to ask this question is why do so many people with tinnitus also have problems sleeping?

I am sure I don't have to tell you the first obvious link – those damned tinnitus noises!

You naturally tend to be more aware of your tinnitus when you slow down and are in a quiet environment. So as you are settling down to sleep your tinnitus noises can interfere and stop you from moving into that peaceful, drowsy and relaxed state halfway between being awake and sleeping.

The sleep scientists talk about 5 stages of sleep and for stage 1 to be effective (so you drift off to sleep quickly), the body should become more relaxed with muscle tension reducing along with your body temperature, your heart rate and breathing slows down and your brain waves also slow down to a pattern known as theta.

(We will get to how you can make things better under the 7 steps to better sleep section).

Three other deadly tinnitus connections that may keep you awake

Number 1 – Tinnitus and your hyper-active brain

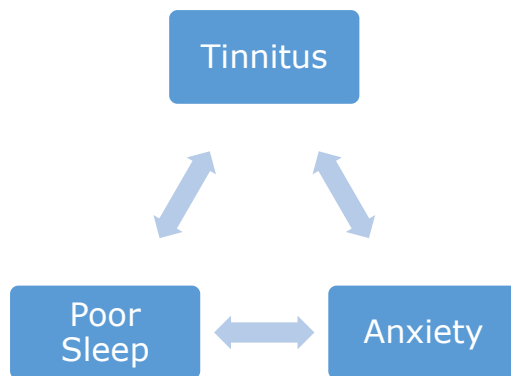
"Sleeping is hard when your mind is full of thoughts", from quoteslife101.net

We have all had nights where it seems like our brain is working over-time rehashing some tough conversation we had during the day, or when we are trying to make some big decision.

Brain research is showing that if you have tinnitus your brain is not just always switched on – it is **Full ON**, or as the research scientists describe it “tinnitus and the over-active brain”. A summary of the research was published in Science Daily on August 25th 2017. The work by University of Illinois researchers using MRI scans found that chronic tinnitus is associated with changes in certain networks in the brain (a region called the precuneus) that causes the brain to stay more at attention and less at rest – not a good state for sleep.

Number 2 – Tinnitus and Anxiety

You may well be stuck in a vicious cycle where one of the symptoms from your Tinnitus is high levels of Anxiety which then makes it difficult to Sleep, and the lack of Sleep makes both your Tinnitus and Anxiety worse and so it goes on.



"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated", Confucius

Later in this guide we will address ways to break that vicious cycle.

Number 3 – Taking a pill can make your tinnitus worse

Although almost everyone knows long term use of sleeping pills is bad, a huge number of people rely on medication to help them sleep.

Just to be clear, I am not saying you should point blank refuse to take any medication prescribed by your doctor to help with anxiety or sleep (at least for a short period of time).

You will see later there are better ways of tackling your Anxiety, Sleep and Tinnitus challenges without taking drugs.

We also warn our Tinnitus Tunes members that some of the pills prescribed to help depression, anxiety and tinnitus can have a side effect of triggering tinnitus, or if you already have tinnitus making it worse. So if you already have tinnitus, make sure to discuss the potential side effects of any medication with both your doctor and your pharmacist.

As an example, two classes of anti-depressants to be especially careful with are:

- Tricyclic (e.g. Trepiline & Amitriptyline)
- Selective Serotonin Re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) – including Prozac and Paxil

Some doctors may also prescribe Xanax (not available in some countries) for tinnitus or sleeping difficulties. However, some research has shown that Xanax can also trigger tinnitus in some patients.

How much sleep do I need?

It is a mix of good and bad news – particularly if you are getting older (and if you have tinnitus there is a high probability that you are over 50 and perhaps in your 60s, or a sprightly 70 plus – this is based on the profile of Tinnitus Tunes members and those attending the University of Auckland, Hearing & Tinnitus Clinic).

Age Bracket	Typical hours of sleep required daily
New born baby	16 to 18 hours
8 to 10 year old child	About 10 hours
Teenager	8 hours (of course they have an amazing ability to sleep until lunchtime if given a chance, for example at weekends!)
35 to 50 years old	About 7 hours
By the time we are in our 60s & 70s	Between 6 and 6.5 hours

What about the quality of sleep?

You may recall I mentioned earlier there are 5 sleep stages:

- Stage 1 – where you are drifting from being awake into sleep and your brain wave pattern and other parts of your physiology are all slowing down and relaxing.
- Stage 2 – your body is calmer, you are less aware of the outside world but can still be easily roused or disturbed.
- Stages 3 and 4 typically kick in after about 30 to 40 minutes and are regarded as “deep sleep” with very slow brain wave patterns called delta. During this stage our breathing, heart rate, blood pressure etc. are all at their lowest levels of the day. It is much more difficult to wake someone up from this deep sleep. This deep sleep and the next stage (REM sleep) are so important for maintaining our physical, mental and emotional health.
- Typically after about 45 minutes in deep sleep, we briefly revert back to Stage 2 for a few minutes before entering Stage 5 – our “dream sleep” stage, often called REM sleep because of the rapid eye movements that can be detected. It is almost as if we were watching the dream. During this dream state our heart rate, blood pressure and breathing increase and can become irregular.
- During a good night’s sleep we would typically cycle from Stage 1 to Stage 5 in about 90 minutes and have between 4 and 5 complete cycles.
- In a nice healthy sleep pattern - we would spend about half the night either in the deep sleep or dream state.

Sadly as we get older, we spend less and less time in the “deep sleep” stage, so the overall restorative quality of our sleep gets worse.

So why am I telling you all this background stuff?

Partly it is to dispel the myth that we all need at least 8 hours sleep a night.

If you are 60 plus, it is much more likely that you only “need” between 6 and 7 hours per night. You will also read about many famous people who get by very well on 4 to 5 hours per night.

So don’t put undue pressure on yourself to try for over 7 hours per night. Please also see the potential use of Sleep Restriction Therapy in Step 7, Tip 2 which is recommended worth considering if you are having serious problems sleeping.

We will of course cover lots of stuff later to help you improve the quality of your sleep, but when we talk about sleep difficulties we need to consider three different aspects:

- Sleep onset difficulty – for example, Mary turned off her bedside light at 11pm, but tossed and turned for ages until she finally dozed off at 3 am.
- Sleep maintenance challenges – Dave also turned off his light at 11pm and fell asleep almost straight away. However, after a couple of hours he woke up and could not get back to sleep. After tossing & turning for what seemed like hours he fell asleep again. He then woke up again at 4.30 am and could not get back to sleep.
- Poor quality sleep – Stuart has no difficulty falling asleep and does not seem to lie awake during the night. However, when he wakes up he is still tired and grumpy. He feels as if he has not slept at all.

‘The amount of sleep required by the average person is 5 minutes more!’ From PictureQuotes.com

The 7 steps to better sleep – let’s get into it

You CAN get More and Better quality ZZZZZZZZZZZZZs

Step 1 – Establish base camp

To see the improvement, you have to first know your baseline (your starting point) and then reinforce every improvement that works for you. However, we don’t want to spend too long focusing on your current state (problems), instead we want your mind to be focused on a new and better future state.

So I recommend you only keep a diary for a maximum of 7 nights before beginning your series of changes. On a piece of paper, or a spreadsheet if you are that way inclined, you want to answer 9 questions.

Question	Night 1	Night 2	Night 3	Night 4	Night 5	Night 6	Night 7
What time did you go to bed?							
What time was lights out?							
How long was it before you were asleep after lights out?							
How many times did you wake up during							

Question	Night 1	Night 2	Night 3	Night 4	Night 5	Night 6	Night 7
the night?							
What was the average amount of time you were awake for each time?							
What time did you wake up for the last time?							
What time did you get out of bed?							
Based on the times given above, roughly how many hours did you sleep for?							
Rate your quality of sleep (1 being poor and 4 fantastic)							

It is important that you avoid “clock watching” in order to complete the diary – that will just make things worse. So just estimate times.

Step 2 – Loving your bedroom

If you read any magazine article or book about helping you sleep better it will stress how important your sleep environment, or some call it sleep hygiene is. I agree so here are some tips that are simple, but work a treat.

Tip 1 – Sex & Sleep only

Sorry a bit cheeky, but you should not be using your bedroom for watching TV, doing work, using any computers, smartphones or Kindle devices (an old fashioned book is okay if it helps your “wind down” routine).

If you use your phone as an alarm, make sure it is set to sleep mode (you don’t want it to be pinging all night with messages).

Tip 2 – Have your room as dark as possible

We were designed to go to bed when the sun went down and get up at sunrise. Nice, but not really practical for most of us – probably the closest we get is on holiday camping.

So go for the next best thing, block out all light in the room while you sleep. Use black lining on your curtains (having shutters or blinds as well as the curtains works great). Make sure no light comes under the bedroom door or from your bathroom. Make sure there are no LED lights from air conditioning units, alarms etc.

I remember once sleeping through until 10am one time we stayed in a hotel that had a really dark room – bliss (probably helped being on holiday too!).

Tip 3 – love your bed

Invest in a good quality bed, sheets, pillows and duvet. Comfort, the right temperature and good support (back, neck and head) are all so important to help you sleep well. I am sure you notice the difference when you stay in a hotel with a good bed and high quality sheets – so make sure you have them at home as well.

Step 3 – Are you setting yourself up for success?

Changing your diet

By eating well during the day you will be able to have a lighter supper so you are less likely to find yourself lying awake feeling “stuffed”. You can also check if having spicy foods has an impact on you, for some people they over stimulate your digestive systems and make it more difficult to sleep.

You know that caffeine is a stimulant and it can still impact hours after you have consumed it. So avoid all forms of caffeine from late afternoon onwards. That includes; coffee, tea, energy drinks and chocolate. There are plenty of caffeine free herbal teas to choose from. An old favourite of course is warm milk – it just seems to have an inbuilt association with going to bed and sleep.

Although a glass of wine or a wee dram may help to make you feel relaxed and sleepy, it is important not to overdo it. As too much alcohol will interfere with your important REM sleep cycle.

Making sure you have enough vitamin B6 and B3 as they can also help improve the quality of your sleep. Vitamin B6 helps the body convert tryptophan into serotonin which helps regulate your sleep cycle. Bananas, fish, poultry and chickpeas are all good sources of B6.

Vitamin B3 will help you sleep longer and get deep sleep that really refreshes you. Good sources of B3 include; poultry, pork and nuts.

Last, but not least although it is important to drink lots of water during the day. You want to avoid having to get up during the night to go to the bathroom. So avoid drinking lots of fluids and also empty your bladder just before going to bed.

Exercise and fresh air

I am sure you have had the experience where you are so physically exhausted you can hardly keep your eyes open and when your head hits that pillow you are out for the count.

It might not be possible, or even sensible as you get older to get to that state too often, but the best time to go to bed is when we are physically tired. So for me I know I sleep much better when I have had lots of exercise and ideally combined with plenty of fresh sea air and sunshine.

You need to find what suits you, but certainly I would encourage you to get out & about not only to help your sleep, but your general mental and physical well-being. It could be:

- Walking or cycling
- Playing lawn bowls or golf
- Swimming
- Gardening
- Yoga, Tai Chi or stretching and resistance work outs at the gym

From a timing perspective, to have the biggest impact on your sleep your exercise should be less than 6 hours and more than 2 hours before bedtime.

Step 4 – Let's tackle your tinnitus

At the start of this guide we talked about the connections between having tinnitus and difficulty sleeping. So let's power into how to have an impact.

Visualisation, breathing and progressive relaxation

The goal is to become calm, relaxed and to switch your attention away from your tinnitus noises. I still vividly remember the first time I used progressive relaxation. I was a student studying psychology and our group went into a room with low ambient lighting and soft cushions spread around the room.

At the front of the room was a CD player with a sign saying press play, make yourself comfortable, close your eyes and just enjoy the next 20 minutes. This calm and soothing voice gently took us through a series of movements to progressively tense and relax our muscles while we focused on our breathing and the soothing background music.

At the end of the 20 minutes none of us could move we were so chilled out and relaxed, I am sure some were fast asleep. Certainly our minds were not thinking about assignments or exams!

You can use these same techniques to shift attention away from your tinnitus, to "calm your mind" and to help slow your "over-active brain" that is partly caused by your tinnitus.

If you use these techniques when you go to bed it will also help ease you gently into a perfect sleep cycle.

You can get some of these techniques from the internet. We have linked up with Universities in Australia and the USA to bring you examples of all three techniques (Visualisation, breathing exercises and progressive relaxation) and included them within your Tinnitus Tunes membership.

Now I will be honest, becoming a member of Tinnitus Tunes will help you on the journey to being more relaxed – but the real game changer is when you use the Brain Training technique to shift attention away from your tinnitus so here is a [link to where you can become a member of our community](#).

You don't have to live with anxiety, or Tinnitus

When we find a good resource we like to share it with our Tinnitus Tunes members (hopefully if you have taken advantage of the link above you will soon be part of our community).

Over time we may change which external resources we recommend (and sometimes those recommendations come from our members). Examples include:

- An online course that uses meditation and mindfulness techniques to help calm your over active mind and shift attention away from your tinnitus.
- The use of a brain training app that again shifts attention away from your tinnitus and the brain exercises also reduce the risk of dementia in the same way as doing the crossword.

Using sound & music to help you sleep

No doubt you already know about the use of masking sounds to help control your tinnitus. Those same sounds can also help you drift off to sleep by reducing the contrast between the silence of your bedroom and the tinnitus noises in your head.

There are a few different ways you can use the masking sounds, or gentle relaxing music including;

- Playing the sounds on your smartphone or tablet – trouble is it goes against one of our earlier tips – to avoid looking at electronic screens as you are going to bed.
- Investing in an earbud, or hearable device like the Nuheara IQ Buds or IQ Boost. These earbuds can be used to stream music (including soothing sounds to help you sleep). They can also help people with mild hearing loss, particularly if you struggle to hear in a noisy environment like a bar or restaurant. You might find the buds a bit bulky for sleeping.
- As an alternative you can invest in a specialist “sound generator” – not a great name, but they do work well and you can minimise the impact of having any lights / electronic screens if you choose carefully. Most of the sound generators come with a range of different sounds, but with some models you can also add your own sounds.
- If you joined Tinnitus Tunes you will have access to a large range of sounds to experiment with until you find one you like.
- Another good source of sounds is <https://mynoise.net> – there is a large range of free sounds available, although they do seek a donation to help keep the site running.
- Free and with an added bonus in summer – it is worth trying just having a floor or ceiling fan on – it provides a steady background hum and can keep you cool (nice in summer but also part of the process of drifting off to sleep is for our body temperature to drop slightly).
- Some final tips when it comes to using sound – it is best to pre-set the sound to stop after 30 to 45 minutes, if you are sharing a bed or room – look at using pillow speakers or wireless headphones – you can get them embedded in a head band – although when we have tested these they don’t tend to last very long.

Step 6 – Alternatives to prescription drugs

The use of prescription drugs to help with stress, anxiety, sleep difficulties and tinnitus should be a last resort. If you go to see your primary care doctor (GP or Physician) they typically only have 15 minute appointments with each patient. 15 minutes is insufficient time for anyone to really help someone with these conditions, so sometimes the simplest path is to prescribe a pill.

In this guide we have discussed lots of alternative approaches to help both your tinnitus and your sleep difficulties. The American and British Tinnitus Associations both say there is no compelling evidence that taking supplements, minerals or different forms of homeopathic care will improve your tinnitus. This is the same guidance we give to our Tinnitus Tunes members.

However, we accept that many people believe certain supplements, minerals or natural remedies can help them sleep better. In most cases they are aimed at helping your body relax and creating a feeling of calm. Common examples, many of which have been used for hundreds of years include:

- Unsweetened cherry juice
- Valerian
- Chamomile
- Magnesium
- Lemon balm

Step 7 – Learning new habits

The great news is a good sleep cycle is a habit that can be learned like any other habit.

A lot of what we have covered so far is about you making changes to your current routines (habits) and your environment to achieve a new outcome – better sleep, a calmer more relaxed life and reducing (or even eliminating awareness of your tinnitus) so you enjoy more and more periods of silence.

"Sleeping is nice. You forget about everything for a little while, source unknown."

Here are some extra tips to help you learn that new habit (a good sleep cycle).

Tip 1 – Before you leave work complete your tomorrow's task list

You want to find the best ways of "slowing down the activity" in your brain while you are drifting off to sleep. I find an effective way to avoid thinking about work, or planning the next day in the middle of the night, is to just take 5 minutes at the end of the work-day to write out the next day's to do list (and then leave it either in your briefcase, on your desk or on your phone).

Tip 2 – Consider use of sleep restriction therapy

Sleep Restriction Therapy (SRT) is a behavioural treatment for serious insomnia. In simple terms with SRT your time in bed is restricted to the time you are sleeping. So for example if your average time asleep is 6 hours and you normally want to get up at 6am, you would not go to bed until midnight.

I recommend you read more at <https://goodpath.com/learn/sleep-restriction-therapy>

Tip 3 - Get up at the same time every day

This is a biggie and will feature on most "sleep guides" as you want to create as regular a bedtime routine as possible. This includes getting up at weekends around the same time as you do during the week.

Ideally you will reach the state where you wake up refreshed and raring to go just a few minutes before your alarm goes off.

It is recommended that you also try to go to bed at a similar time each night. At the same time you don't want to turn into a recluse who will never go out at night. It is also better to go to bed when you are tired, rather than strictly by the clock.

Tip 4 – Don't go to bed angry

If you go to bed angry, or without kissing & making up (apologising) after an argument – chances are you will not be calm, relaxed and ready for a great night's sleep.

Tip 5 – Be grateful and go to bed smiling

This is an interesting one, and not something everyone will feel comfortable with. But give it a go for a few nights and see if it works for you. The basic idea is you think about the good things that happened during the day, or the positive things in your life – you can even write them down each night. Then when you lie down really smile!

It may sound a bit crazy – but it releases all the right chemicals in your body & brain to help you relax, be calm and sleep like a baby.

"People who say they sleep like a baby usually don't have one," Leo J Burke.

Tip 6 – Try a massage or hot tub

I personally find a massage or a hot tub great ways to help the body relax, for the brain to slow down and to generally feel drowsy. You may have to experiment with the timing to find how much time before bed works best for you.

Tip 7 – Have a notebook by your bed

This one again works for some people and not others. The idea is if you come up with a great idea, or something you remembered you need to do – by writing it down in the notebook – you “can then let it go.” If you don’t you might stay awake thinking repeatedly about it.

It is another way to “calm that over-active tinnitus brain.”

Tip 8 – Try sleeping alone

It is really nice to share a bed with someone you love – a quote I like is (***“I’m in my bed; you are in your bed. One of us is in the wrong place.”***)

However, if your partner snores really badly, or you are just easily disturbed, you are more likely to sleep better in separate beds (even separate rooms in some cases.)

Other sources of information

As we have gone through the guide we have given a number of links to further information. Those links were active at the time of writing this guide. I apologise if when you read the guide any of the links is no longer active (we will do our best to keep them current).

Further tinnitus information

<https://tinnitustunes.com>

The Tinnitus Tunes content site is dedicated to helping those with tinnitus wherever they maybe in the world. It was designed to extend the reach of who we help through the Hearing & Tinnitus Clinic at the University of Auckland.

www.tinnitus.org.uk

There are many really good publications you can download for free from the British Tinnitus Association. If you are based in the UK they also provide free tinnitus awareness and education seminars.

www.ata.org

The American Tinnitus Association helps fund tinnitus research and we have been fortunate to have some of our staff and students benefit from such funding. They also provide excellent independent high quality information articles.

Online information on sleep difficulties & insomnia

Good article from the British Tinnitus Association

<https://www.tinnitus.org.uk/tinnitus-and-sleep>

Another good article

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/sleep-disorders-and-problems.htm>

Safe use of this material

Medical disclaimer

The information contained in or made available through this guide and the Tinnitus Tunes Website is not intended to replace the services of a trained health professional or to be a substitute for medical advice of physicians. The user should consult a physician in all matters relating to his or her health, and particularly in respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention. All health and health-related information contained is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a health care professional. Your health care provider should be consulted in regard to matters concerning the medical condition, treatment and needs of you and your family. Tinnitus Tunes Limited makes no representations or warranties with respect to any information offered or provided within or through this guide and the Tinnitus Tunes Website regarding treatment, action, or application of medication. Neither Tinnitus Tunes Limited nor any of its Affiliates will be liable for any direct, indirect, consequential, special, exemplary, or other damages arising there from.