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# Mindfulness Based Tinnitus Stress Reduction: Healing from Home During A Pandemic

*Presented by:*

*Jennifer J. Gans, PsyD*

*Moderated by:*

*Jill Mecklenburger, Au.D.*

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course presented in partnership with

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# Learning Outcomes

After this course learners will be able to...

- Describe the role that increased stress plays in sound sensitivity disorders like tinnitus and hyperacusis during Covid 19.
- Describe mindfulness and how a consistent meditation practice can relieve stress and shift tinnitus from 'bothersome' to 'non-bothersome'.
- Describe the challenges faced by the audiology community in providing tinnitus care remotely.
- Discuss recent research into an online 8-week MindfulTinnitusRelief.com course during the time of the Covid pandemic.

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# *Extraordinary Times These Are!!!*

- Humans are Meaning Making Creatures
- We become anxious when we do not understand

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“Tinnitus is a **benign** body sensation that the brain has misunderstood as something important to pay attention to.”

But a person’s REACTION to tinnitus is often not benign.



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## Tinnitus: A Paper Tiger



"Paper tiger" is the English translation of a Chinese phrase referring to something that appears threatening but is actually harmless or benign

# Ears Love Sound!

- In the absence of sound the ears (brain) creates sound—that's how much they love sound!
  - 1953 Heller and Bergman
    - 94% of the 80 apparently normally hearing adults
  - Del Bo et al., 2008
    - 83 percent of the participants reported that they experienced at least one sound
    - percentage increased to 92 percent when loud- speaker was present (attention was brought to listening).

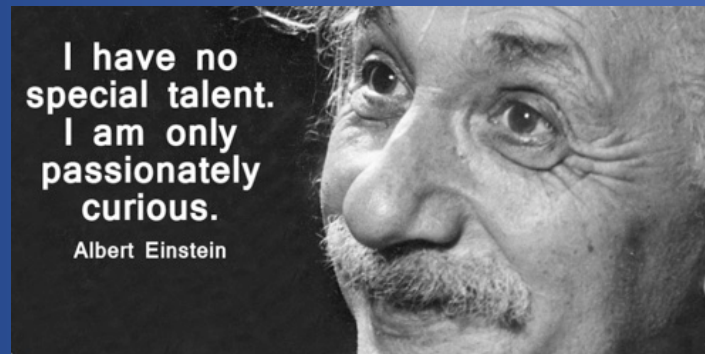
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# Staying Curious With Our Patients

- 50 million Americans experience tinnitus, but 50 million Americans are not necessarily bothered by tinnitus. Hmmm...?
  - Could Anxiety be the difference between one group and the other?
  - Most people that come to us with tinnitus have in common amazing personality characteristics



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# The Special Sauce

- The Special Sauce that has led to hundreds of my patients and participants in the Mindfulness Based Tinnitus Stress Reduction (MBTSR) course shifting their experience of tinnitus from ‘bothersome’ to ‘non-bothersome’ is threefold:
  1. Help the person with tinnitus to feel less anxious about tinnitus
  2. Make the person with tinnitus an expert in what tinnitus is and what it is not
  3. Design a tinnitus management plan that is tailored to the individual person based on their individual needs, wants, likes, and resources (Almost always involves an awareness building practice (ie., meditation))

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# Why Meditate?

- The person with tinnitus has difficulty with attention shifting and attentional control (pre-frontal cortex)
- Their subconscious fear centers are on fire (amygdala)
  - Meditation or Awareness Building is a way to increase the strength of the pre-frontal cortex to 'chill out' the misappraising amygdala




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# The Brain as Symphony



A full-page background image showing a sailboat with two sails up, sailing on a calm sea at sunset. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, with the sun low on the horizon. The water is still, reflecting the colors of the sky and the silhouette of the boat. The boat is positioned on the right side of the frame, moving towards the left.

Pain in life is inevitable;  
Suffering is optional

~Buddha



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- Developed in 2013
- Designed to help people with bothersome tinnitus and hyperacusis shift their experience of tinnitus from “bothersome” to “non-bothersome” in a non-pharmacological/non-surgical way.
- The 8-Week skill building program has the *Special Sauce* baked in:
  1. Help the person with tinnitus to feel less anxious about tinnitus (educational)
  2. Make the person with tinnitus an expert in what tinnitus is and what it is not (educational)
  3. “Rebalance or Re-Tune the brain” with a meditation practice--emphasis on stress reduction (practical)

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## Research is formalized curiosity

- Zora Neale Hurston,  
writer and anthropologist

### What the numbers teach us...

There were two questions that the study sought to answer:

1. Are there changes in the way a person relates to tinnitus as a result of the MindfulTinnitusRelief.com during the 2020 Shelter-In-Place period?
2. Is the MindfulTinnitusRelief.com an effective treatment for those wanting to “heal from home”?

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# Tinnitus: Healing From Home

## Measuring the Efficacy of an 8-Week Online Mindfulness Based Tinnitus Stress Reduction Course During the 2020 Covid Pandemic

- Objectives:
  - To measure the effectiveness of an online 8-week Mindfulness Based Tinnitus Stress Reduction course during the 2020 shelter-in-place Covid pandemic period.
- Design:
  - A follow-up investigation of an 8 Week Online MindfulTinnitusRelief.com Course Offered for Free from March 25-June 9, 2020 with a 6- and 12- month follow-up
- Participants:
  - Participants (N=763) were self-referrals to the online course who completed the outcome measures immediately before the course (N=665), minimum 3-weeks mid-course (N=56), upon course completion (minimum 8-weeks) (N=45), and at 6-month follow-up.
- Intervention:
  - The course consists of 8-weekly tinnitus lessons, guided meditation videos, audio-recordings, and automated emails, with elements of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, completed at a pace to suit the individual (minimum length 8 weeks).
- Outcome measures measured at Pre-, Mid-, Post-, 6- & 12-month Follow-Up
  - The Tinnitus Functional Index – Henry et al (2014)
  - Perceived Stress Scale. – Cohen et al (1983)

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# MindfulTinnitusRelief.com Course

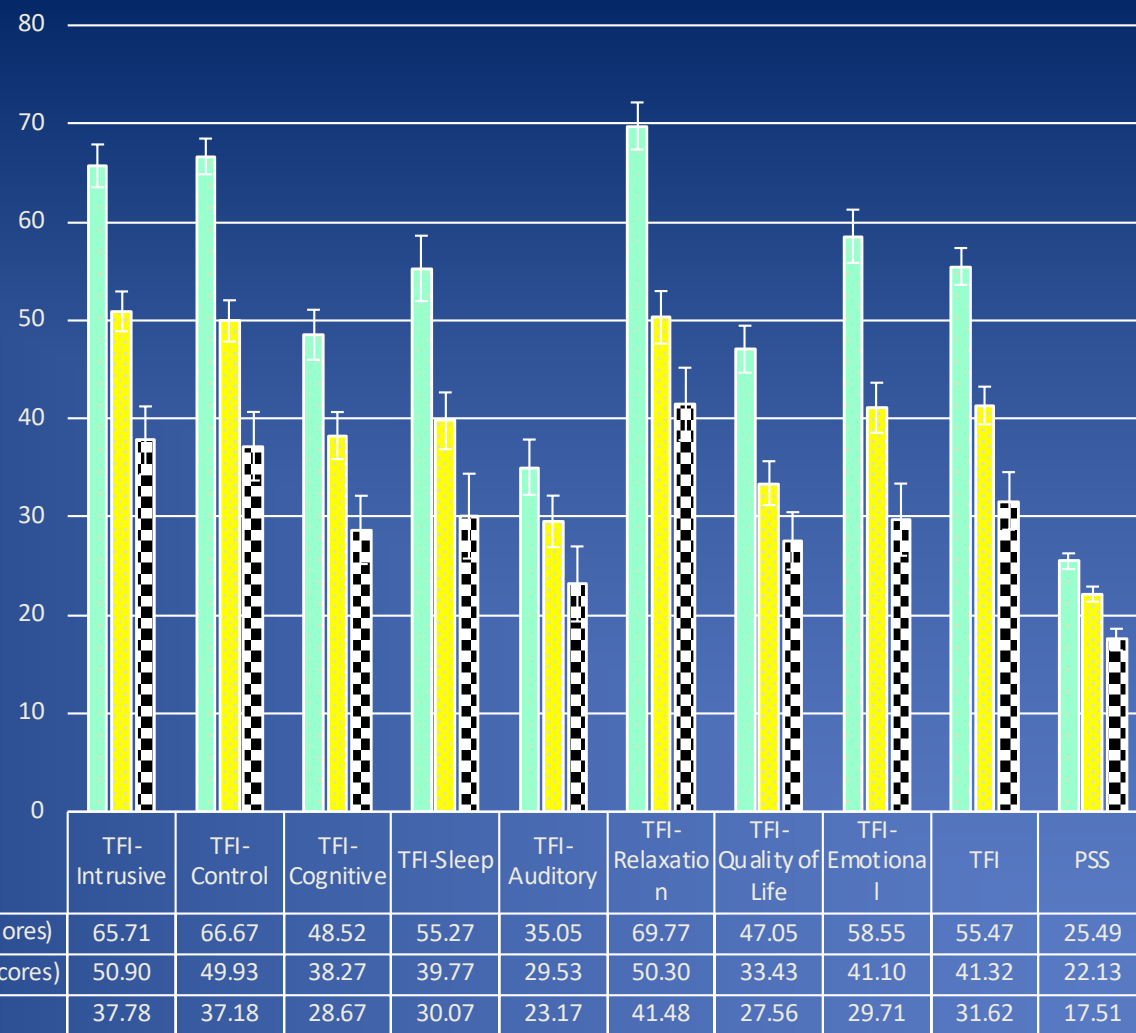


- 8 weeks in length
- Asynchronous
- 2 Hour Class per week
  - Tinnitus Education
  - Mindfulness Lesson
  - Instructor led meditations, gentle yoga, mindful movement
  - Discussion Questions
  - Skill Building Activities, calendars, and readings
- Home Practice: 30 minutes per day, 6 days/week
- A Day-Long Mindfulness Retreat between the 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> week

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Average Scores by Group(s)  
and Time-Points Across Items



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What changes in yourself have you noticed since you began the course?

*"I found myself not labeling the tinnitus as something 'bad' – it just is."*

*"I have noticed how my tinnitus has impacted my life, but also how my reactions are in my control, even if tinnitus is not in my control"*

*"It's funny. After just a few weeks of starting the course, I am noticing that my tinnitus doesn't bother me as much anymore. And I'm getting along better with my husband."*

*"I'm getting sleep without use of medication."*

*"I am not bothered by the tinnitus as much as I used to be. I don't let it control my life anymore."*

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## Conclusions & Future Steps:

- The online mindfulness course is an effective intervention which reduces tinnitus intrusiveness, stress, anxiety and depression in a 2020 Covid-pandemic cohort.
- By 'Healing from Home', in-person visits are curtailed making this period safer for the audiologist and patient.
- Home-Access puts the responsibility for healing back into the lap of the patient—where it belongs
- Future research is required to assess the effects of the course for a non-Covid Pandemic tinnitus sample.

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Thank You!  
Questions?



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