

The Bowen Technique and Tinnitus

Janie Godfrey outlines the Bowen Technique and how it could help people with tinnitus

The Bowen Technique is a light-touch therapy, pioneered in the 1950's in Australia by Thomas Bowen. The treatment is done through light clothing, with the therapist using thumbs and forefingers to make the unique sets of gentle, rolling-type moves over precise points on the body. The client is then allowed to rest for a few minutes before the treatment carries on.

These short breaks allow the body to respond to the technique by making the subtle and fine adjustments needed to return it to a balanced, efficient and relaxed state.

The Bowen Technique focuses on crucial junctions of muscle and bone, nerve pathways, blood and lymph circulation and energy flow. This type of therapy communication prompts and engages crossovers within and between these systems. Bowen treatment promotes balancing, not only on the structural and functional level, but also for the person's overall well-being. By addressing the body as a whole, the Bowen Technique goes beyond the presented symptoms and embraces the physical, chemical, emotional and mental aspects of the person receiving the treatment.

As most tinnitus professionals will be aware, tinnitus perception in many instances directly correlates to personal stress and anxiety levels. Fundamental to realising the multi-beneficial approach of the Bowen Technique is its ability to induce a state of deep relaxation. This deeply relaxed state is both caused by and helps the impact of the specific soft tissue moves. The effect of Bowen on balancing the autonomic nervous system has been measured and documented by Dr JoAnne Whitaker in a 1997 study (see www.bowen.org). Through this resetting of the autonomic nervous system's action, the individual's body is facilitated in its own dynamic self-regulation while in a state of great relaxation.

Can Bowen help with tinnitus?

Tinnitus is difficult to treat successfully because it seems to have so many different causes. However, Bowen Technique practitioners have seen significant improvements in a number of clients who have mild and intermittent to severe and long-standing tinnitus.

The Bowen Technique is very helpful in relaxing muscle tensions which, if they are tight in the shoulder and neck area, could cause a great deal of strain around the ears and connecting tissues. This is likely to affect the alignment of the head and jaw as well as the circulation and drainage in the area, making a person's tinnitus worse. Because Bowen treatment is very relaxing, it can have a positive effect in reducing stress and anxiety levels. As the symptoms of tinnitus are worse when a person is anxious, tired, worried or stressed, anything that can help with relaxation is thought to be beneficial.

Bowen Technique practitioner Jane East reports treating a 58-year-old man with tinnitus. With a rating of 8/10, he felt his tinnitus was greatly contributing to problems which impacted on his professional life. As these noises were at such a distracting level he felt unable to join in with conversation at social functions, which were an essential element of his job. This fuelled his high levels of stress and anxiety. Following three Bowen treatments, he was able to take part in conversations and remain in a busy room without the distress he had previously experienced. Tinnitus Focus

Although the client's tinnitus hadn't completely gone, it had reduced to a more manageable level of 3/10.

Another case is the experience of a 76-year-old lady who originally went for Bowen treatment for knee pain and back discomfort. While Bowen practitioner Tony Crimes was taking her case history, she also mentioned the high-pitched buzzing sound in her ears, which had been diagnosed as tinnitus three years earlier. With no further support or guidance on how to manage it, she had simply learnt to live with it.

Her first Bowen session finished with the moves around the jaw area and specific relaxation moves around the face and head. Tony advised her to drink plenty of water and keep mobile with gentle walking every day. She was also advised to avoid caffeine drinks, limit her salt intake and practice relaxation techniques, because of her moderately high blood pressure. One week later, when she returned for her second treatment, she reported that not much had changed except for an excellent night's sleep after her first treatment.

During her third treatment, she reported a 'clicking sound' in her left ear during the jaw moves. Three days later she rang Tony to say that she had slept well for two nights, her back was better, her knee was still a bit sore, but she was amazed that the buzzing sound had reduced dramatically – the first time any change had occurred in three years. Tony made an appointment for her to return in a month's time. When she arrived, she was still in a much-improved state with her back and knee and said that although her tinnitus 'came and went' it had vastly improved overall.

Most people who have tinnitus or who are involved in helping to manage it agree that most therapies are 'hit-or-miss'. The Bowen Technique is not exception – but there is certainly evidence to suggest that it can really help some people and could be used as a valuable tinnitus management tool.

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