

Self-Help Books for Tinnitus-Related Distress: Do They Really Help?

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About 20 percent of individuals with tinnitus experience substantial distress because of their condition. Some of these individuals go to a psychologist. Some try self-help books. There is evidence that cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy can help individuals cope with tinnitus and evidence that self-help guides, together with a therapist's support, are beneficial. However, there is no published evidence that self-help books on their own can help reduce distress.

Can a book stimulate change?

With a grant from the American Tinnitus Association, we evaluated the effects of a cognitive-behavioral self-help book, *Tinnitus: A Self-Management Guide for the Ringing in Your Ears*, by Jane L. Henry, Ph.D., and Peter H. Wilson, Ph.D. (2001). To begin, we

- Using self-instructions, such as, "I can deal with this situation by using one of the coping methods I have learned."
- Making lifestyle changes, such as increasing the number of pleasant events one experienced.

We asked study participants to read the book carefully and to follow its suggestions within a period of eight weeks.

The study participants' experience

At the end of week eight, we again collected information from the participants about their distress levels. We obtained data from 57 of the 84 individuals in the book (intervention) group and 70 of the 78 individuals in the control group. The results indicated that the participants in the book group significantly decreased both their tinnitus and general distress. On average, those in the control group remained essentially unchanged, which suggests that within the context of the study, the book was at least helpful in reducing distress. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.) We were pleased that some participants commented that the coping methods suggested for tinnitus also helped them cope with other stressors.

We asked the individuals in the book group how much they had read. Their average was 82 percent of the book. We also asked them whether they made changes as suggested in the book. We found that the more they made changes in their thinking, behavior and relevant situations, the greater the reduction in distress they experienced. That finding suggests that self-help books are most useful when the reader does what the author(s) recommends.

After collecting post-information from control group participants, we sent them the books and will soon evaluate whether they also show reductions in their distress levels.

Conclusions

Four months after the start of the study, we again evaluated members of the initial group assigned to use the book. As a group they had maintained their improvement. Thus, our preliminary findings indicate that a self-help book based on cognitive-behavioral techniques can indeed assist tinnitus sufferers. ☺☺☺

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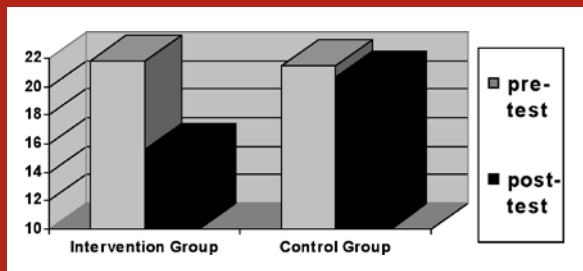


Figure 1. Tinnitus-Related Distress

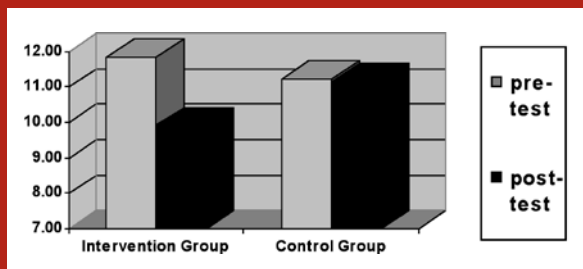


Figure 2. General Distress

recruited adults in Australia who felt distressed by tinnitus. All the participants completed measures of tinnitus-related distress and general distress when they entered the study. (See Fig. 1 and Fig 2.) We randomly assigned 162 participants to either read the book over eight weeks or serve as part of a waiting-list control group.

The book provides educational information regarding tinnitus and suggests strategies for:

- Changing one's emotions by thinking differently.
- Relaxing and managing stress.
- Directing attention away from tinnitus.