



# Sound Massage as Relaxation Tool for Those Suffering from Hearing Loss or Tinnitus

Angelika Nebl and Dr. phil. Christina M. Koller

Hearing loss (hypoacusis) refers to a decline in the ability to hear. It can range from a mild limitation to complete deafness; it may be transient or permanent. Based on information from the Deutscher Schwerhörigenbund (German Association for the Hearing Impaired), approximately 16 million people are affected by hearing loss.

Two conditions are on a rapid, frightening rise: sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSHL) and tinnitus (ringing in the ears). For the majority, these are attributable to psychosocial stress and develop – if not therapeutically managed – into an additional and often significant negative impact on daily life.

About 340,000 people are newly diagnosed with tinnitus every year per the German Tinnitus Conference, with a profound effect on quality of life of those affected. Approximately 18.7 Germans have already experienced ringing in the ears – even if just on a temporary basis.

Devices are available for those with impaired hearing with the goal: hear more, understand more, improved hearing performance, hearing aids, implantable hearing devices. Often overlooked are the psychological and psychosomatic effects of hearing loss and tinnitus. As a holistic relaxation method, sound massage may provide complementary, i.e., in conjunction with medical treatment, support to those affected.



## A project of the Association, vonOHRzuOHR (fromEARtoEAR), in Linz, Austria

I (Angelika Nebl) have been hearing impaired for 40 years and wear hearing aids in both ears. In 2003, I participated in the founding of the project "vonOHRzuOHR" (fromEARtoEAR), which was initiated and is supported by the Association of the same name. Since then, I work as a counselor for the hearing impaired and offer free sound massage as relaxation to people affected by hearing loss or tinnitus.

The Association vonOHRzuOHR is a fulcrum for better hearing. We are available to all interested parties and those affected in all aspects of the subject of hearing loss. Our objective is to help improve the situation and quality of life of people who are hearing impaired in society. The project vonOHRzuOHR therefore also provides business consulting on this important subject. This is because in just Austria alone, there are approx. 540,000 workers of which 19 percent are affected by hearing loss of some kind. That amounts to approx. 103,220 employees in 11,305 companies – and the number is rising. By order of the Ministry for Social Affairs, we provide free employee consultation to Austrian companies.

Our team consists of hearing loss sufferers, their family members, as well as specialists and is in a position to address the individual needs of the hearing impaired. Our services include consultation, speech therapy, prevention, and free relaxation methods with singing bowls. Additionally, we provide self-help groups for those suffering from hearing loss.

One area of emphasis of our Association is tinnitus. In Austria, around 80,000 people are affected by tinnitus, many of them are also hearing impaired. With the right hearing therapy, an acoustician can better adjust hearing aids for people with tinnitus. I, too, hear noise when I am not wearing my hearing aids, but never otherwise!

Since we also provide literature on the subject, I read in a textbook, that Dr. Uwe Ross – a German ENT physician – recommends sound massage for those suffering from tinnitus. And so I began my training to become a Peter Hess®- sound massage practitioner and completed it in 2011 in Reichenau at the Rax/ Austria. Since then, I provide sound massage, called "singing bowl massage" here at the project vonOHRzuOHR, for the hearing impaired or those affected by tinnitus free of charge.

I am personally very thankful that I was introduced to singing bowls approx. 15 years ago by a chiropractor – I knew right away that I would like to experience sound therapy again or learn it for myself. This wish came true.

## Relaxation therapy with singing bowls for those affected by tinnitus

My sound message session lasts about 20 minutes and is comprised of a short basic sound massage with several specific sound elements such as "sound mindfulness in the aura".

Many of my clients find a sound massage very relaxing because the ringing/noise of the tinnitus is "superimposed", and relaxation can happen rapidly. There are often cases with acute tinnitus where after three to four sound massages, the tinnitus is considerably reduced or gone altogether. Many who have suffered from tinnitus for years describe the sound massage as relaxing even if it does not result in a significant or permanent change of their tinnitus. They come back for repeat sessions because relaxation opens the potential for change and reorganization.

## Sound massage for annoying tinnitus

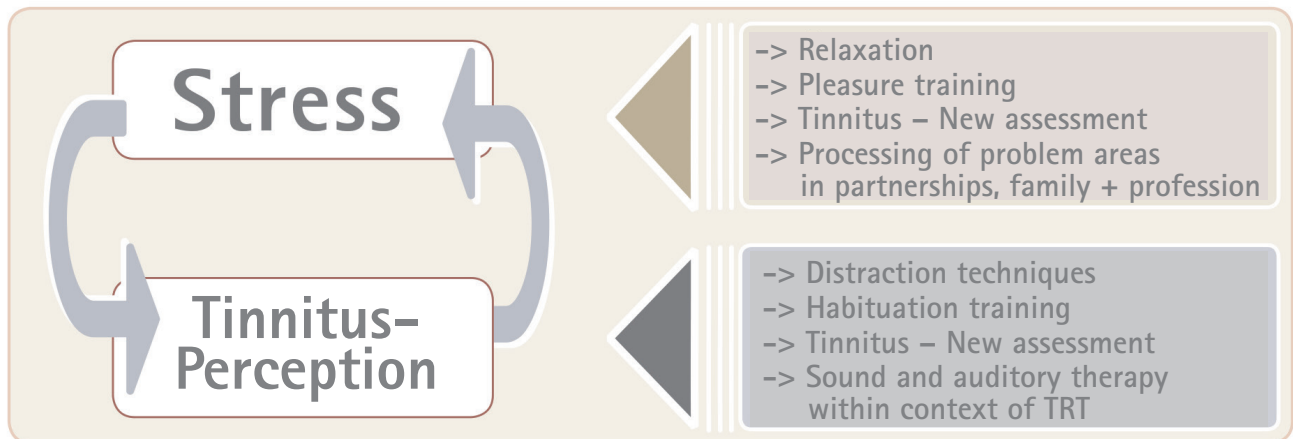
The term tinnitus is derived from the Latin word, "tinnire", and means ringing. In general, tinnitus refers to sounds and noises that are localized in the ear or head without an external sound source, explains Dr. Uwe Ross in his article "Sound massage for annoying tinnitus" (2010, p. 144–159). In Germany, approx. three million people suffer from annoying tinnitus. Their quality of life is in part negatively impacted through difficulty hearing, sleep and attention disorders, limited performance capacity, social isolation, or anxiety and depression, per the Freiburg ENT physician and psychotherapist. The causes can be diverse; stress may be a reason for the onset of tinnitus. Sound massage, as holistic relaxation therapy, can provide support within the context of a multimodal approach. In addition to stress reduction, sound therapy – with respective background knowledge and experience – can influence psychological factors such as attention focus and suggestive moments.

Photo: Archiv Peter Hess® Institut



Following medical evaluation and treatment, sound massage, as a complementary / supportive therapy for those suffering from tinnitus, can be a helpful tool for stress reduction. Ross (edb., p. 156) writes:

*"Emotional states of excitement such as anxiety, anger, or sadness increase the perception of tinnitus. Since it is generally not possible to influence tinnitus directly – but the state of those who are affected can be influenced as well as the emotions associated with tinnitus – it is helpful to reduce stress through relaxation. This is where sound massage techniques for relaxation or revitalization (sound pyramid, sound bath) or also the basic techniques can be applied effectively."*



III.: Associations between tinnitus and stress with therapeutic application opportunities (Ross, 2010, p. 156)

Dr. Ross, who is himself trained in Peter Hess®-sound massage, has developed specific interventions and techniques for application with those affected by tinnitus. These can be used to target and change tinnitus-related experience patterns – emotions, involuntary thoughts, attitudes, autonomous responses – and to stimulate an inner reorganization on an emotional or autonomous basis. He offers two consecutive seminars at PHI with the title "Sound Massage with Tinnitus I + II" in which he teaches these techniques based on an established, deep understanding of the tinnitus model and the principles of tinnitus therapy. These

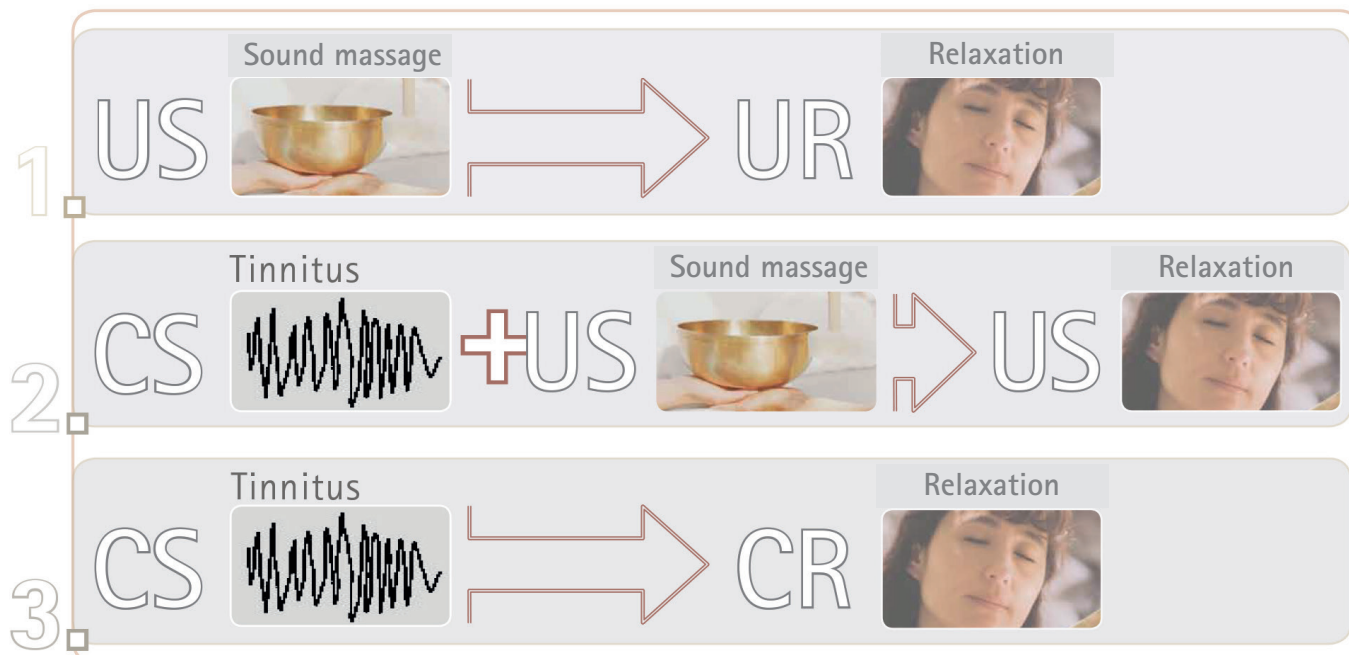
sound massage therapies can also be understood and used as techniques of counterconditioning, explains Ross (edb. p. 158). This builds on the principle of "reciprocal inhibition", whereby anxious excitability and physical relaxation cannot exist simultaneously. In the form of systemic desensitization, the sound therapies can effect a new connection of tinnitus perception with positive experiences such as relaxation on a physical level.

Furthermore, the soothing sounds that are generally experienced during a sound massage can relativize the negative experiences of ringing and noise with tinnitus.

*Sound massage can provide relaxation and relief to those suffering from tinnitus.*

Photo: Ana Königsbaum





III.: Repeated connection of emotionally negative tinnitus experience (CS, conditioned stimulus) with the natural relaxation response (UR, unconditioned response) over time leads to a newly learned relaxation response to the tinnitus (CR, conditioned response).  
 US = unconditioned stimulus (Ross, 2010, p. 159)

#### Literature

Ross, Uwe H.: Klangmassage bei störendem Tinnitus. In: Peter Hess-Klangmethoden im Kontext von Forschung und Wissenschaft, Verlag Peter Hess 2010, S. 144-159. (Sound massage for annoying tinnitus. In Peter-Hess Sound Methods in context of research and science, Publisher: Peter Hess 2010 p. 144 – 159)

Ross, Uwe H.: Tinnitus – So finden Sie wieder Ruhe. Weltbild 2010 (Tinnitus – how to find peace again. Weltbild 2010)



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1957 born in Linz, education HBLA, Office-Management and since 2011 Peter Hess®- sound massage practitioner. Since 2003, Chair and Counselor for the hearing impaired in the Association and project vonOHRzuOHR as well as Vice President of the Austrian Association for the Hearing Impaired (Österreichischen Schwerhörigenbundes).

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