

Tinnitus FOCUS

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The Bowen Technique and Tinnitus

By Janie Godfrey

The Bowen Technique is a light-touch therapy, pioneered in the 1950's by Thomas Bowen of Australia. The treatment is done through light clothing and the therapist uses just thumbs and forefingers to make the unique sets of gentle, rolling-type moves over precise points on the body, which are then alternated with leaving the client to rest for a few minutes. These short breaks allow the body to respond by making the subtle and fine adjustments needed to return the body to a balanced, efficient and relaxed state of function.

The Bowen moves are focused on crucial junctions of muscle and bone, nerve pathways, blood and lymph circulation and energy flow. Communication crossovers within and between the systems are prompted and facilitated. Bowen treatment promotes balancing not only on the structural level and functional systems, but also at the level of the individual's overall well-being. Addressing the body as a whole in this way, the Bowen Technique treats beyond the presented symptoms and embraces the physical, chemical, emotional and mental aspects of each person receiving the treatment.

Fundamental to realising this multi-level benefit is the Bowen Technique's ability to induce a state of deep relaxation. This deeply relaxed state is both caused by and, at the same time, facilitates 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, while in a state of great relaxation, the individual's body is facilitated in its own dynamic self-regulation.

Can Bowen help with Tinnitus?

Tinnitus is a difficult condition to treat with success because it seems to have so many different causes but in some cases, Bowen Technique practitioners have seen significant improvements in clients with everything from mild and intermittent to severe and long-standing tinnitus.

The Bowen Technique is very helpful with relaxing muscle tensions which, if they are tight in the shoulder and neck area, could be causing a great deal of strain around the ears and connecting tissues, affecting the alignment of the head and jaw as well as the free circulation and drainage in the area. Because Bowen treatment is very relaxing, the effect on stress and anxiety can be profound. As the symptoms of tinnitus are worse when a person is anxious, tired, worried or stressed, anything that significantly and reliably helps with relaxation will have an effect on these.

Bowen Technique practitioner Jane East reports treating a 58-year-old man with tinnitus. He was experiencing problems which impacted on his professional life since the tinnitus was at a level of around 8/10 and he was unable to engage in conversation at social functions, which were an essential element of his job. Following three Bowen treatments, he was able to engage in conversation and remain in a busy room without the tinnitus distress previously suffered. It was not cured but had reduced to a 3/10 level.

A case history that touches on the role played by loud noise is from Bowen practitioner Angela Casey whose teenage son, who has cerebral palsy, has also always had deafness in one ear. He had a hearing test on his DEAF ear to see if any hearing had developed, something his mother would have refused had she known what it entailed. The test involved putting very high levels of white sound in his good ear and then gradually increasing the sound levels in his deaf ear. The result was a dreadfully frightening "sound shock" in his deaf ear, which terrified him and which he described as like someone hitting him on that side of his head with a hammer. He was then terribly distressed by the development of severe tinnitus in his hearing ear. Angela treated him

with the Bowen jaw area moves and associated work, headwork, face moves etc, which was very successful at reducing the levels and, thankfully, gradually the tinnitus faded to nothing over a period of time.

Another indication that Bowen is worth trying for tinnitus is the experience of a 76 year old lady who originally went for Bowen treatment for knee pain and back discomfort. While Tony Crimes, the Bowen practitioner, was taking her case history she also mentioned the high pitched buzzing sound in her ears that she had been told was tinnitus about 3 years previously and that she had 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, keep mobile with gentle walking every day. She was also advised to avoid caffeine drinks, limit her salt intake and practice relaxation techniques due to 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, one week later, 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 then decided to leave this resolution alone for a while and 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 her tinnitus 'came and went' but was vastly improved overall.

Most people trying to deal with tinnitus agree that it is a difficult condition and that most treatments are 'hit-or-miss'. This is also the case with The Bowen Technique, but there is certainly some evidence that it can be of significant help with tinnitus and should therefore be tried. It could be a valuable tool in managing this condition and it could offer many other benefits to overall health in addition.

About the author: Janie Godfrey is a Bowen Technique practitioner with a busy clinic in Frome, Somerset and also works part-time in the European College of Bowen Studies office.