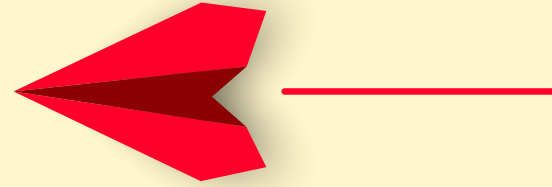


10 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Strategies to Manage a “Bad Tinnitus Day”



By Bruce Hubbard, PhD

It is common when struggling with

tinnitus to find that some days are more challenging than others. So-called bad tinnitus days can result from a number of sources. Fluctuations in stress can drain internal resources used for coping with tinnitus. As a result, on days when your general stress is higher, tinnitus can feel louder and more intrusive.

Fluctuations in the actual sound of tinnitus, the volume, pitch, and type of sound, can also occur. According to the Tinnitus Archive, 25 percent of people experience these fluctuations several times a week.¹ Many report that whatever tinnitus they wake up to is what they’ll have for the day.

These fluctuations in tinnitus can present unique challenges to adapting, recovering, and moving on.

Whatever the source of your “bad tinnitus day,” these 10 strategies, drawn from Acceptance-Based Cognitive Behavior Therapy, can help.²

1 Expect Louder, More Challenging Days

Periods of louder tinnitus are often viewed as “spikes,” something

that shouldn’t happen and can be somehow prevented. But these fluctuations are normal for tinnitus and cannot be controlled. Accepting that tinnitus will fluctuate within a range of volume, pitch, and type of sound helps you know what to expect and be better prepared when it occurs.

2 Make a Plan for Louder, More Challenging Days

Make a plan for how you will cope with more challenging tinnitus days. Commit to following through on your plan no matter how you are feeling. Your plan should include elements of recommendations in this article.

3 Get Your Attention off Tinnitus and on to What You Can Do to Cope

I know how awful tinnitus can be. But we have a choice—we can focus on what’s awful, or we can redirect our energy to accepting what we can’t change and changing what we can. Commit to shifting your focus to what you can do to improve your situation.

4 Lean Into the Challenge

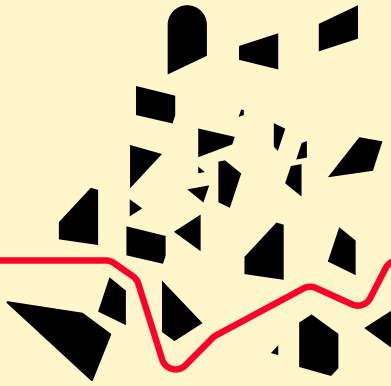
Hiding out and suffering with tinnitus reinforces the cycle of distress. Breaking the cycle takes courage and a willingness to tolerate short-term discomfort for long-term relief. Have confidence in your ability to reclaim your life from tinnitus.

5 Write a Coping Statement and Review It Often

Write a brief paragraph to summarize your more helpful thoughts to guide effective coping. Review your statement often to keep your better thinking top of mind. Read it especially first thing in the morning, to start the day on the right note.

Your statement may include:

- Reassurance that by responding more effectively it will gradually get easier to hear tinnitus over time.
- Acknowledgment of progress you’ve made, including times you’ve handled more challenging tinnitus well or forgotten about it completely.



- Mention of your goals, values, and commitment to getting back to them.

Sample Coping Statement for a Challenging Tinnitus Day

“Okay, maybe this won’t go away for good. But it’s been louder before, and it’s always come back down. Ultimately, whether it’s loud or soft, high or low, a cricket or a hiss, it’s all just unimportant sound. I choose to live! I’m committed to leaning into this challenge, to getting out of my ears and back into my life.

“I’ve got a reasonable plan for the day. So here I go!”

6 Practice Hearing Tinnitus Effectively

Rather than avoiding hearing tinnitus, in acceptance-based CBT we practice hearing tinnitus effectively, without being swept up in thoughts and feelings about how awful it is. The goal is to reduce our fear and annoyance of tinnitus and make it easier to hear tinnitus while reengaging fully in life. Mindfulness of sound—hearing tinnitus without getting swept up in the negative thoughts and

judgements—is the primary strategy for hearing tinnitus effectively.

7 Don’t White-Knuckle It Through a Louder Day

Balance your courage and willingness with as-needed use of sound enrichment and, if prescribed by your doctor, judicious use of short-term anxiety-reducing benzodiazepines. These are the crutches available over the course of healing, recovering, and adapting to tinnitus.

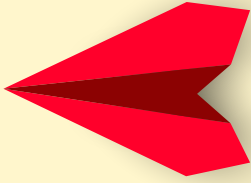
- **Sound enrichment:** In acceptance-based CBT, we use sound enrichment as needed to supplement careful thinking, courageous action, and mindfulness. Having a helpful blending sound, putting on some music, TV, radio, or podcast in the background can help you through more challenging periods with tinnitus.
- **Benzodiazepines:** Benzodiazepines (e.g., clonazepam, diazepam, lorazepam) are an evidence-based treatment for acute anxiety and can be a blessing on tough tinnitus days. Judicious, medically directed use of benzodiazepines to help you through the early phases of tinnitus distress will

not interfere with habituation. On the contrary, by reducing anxiety and helping you sleep and engage more fully during the day, benzodiazepines may facilitate tinnitus management.

8 Take Courageous Action to Fully Engage in Your Day

In CBT, we follow the rule “Feelings Follow Behavior.” It’s okay to nudge yourself through the motions of getting started with an action plan. The short-term discomfort you feel will eventually give way to a longer-term payoff in relief. Have a morning routine that you commit to regardless of what your tinnitus is doing. Practice your routine on the easier days so that you are better prepared to enact it on the harder days. Your action plan may include:

- **Get out of bed**
Lingering in bed while ruminating on the awfulness of tinnitus only makes things worse. Don’t overthink your tinnitus or what your day may look like. Don’t get stuck in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Get up and start your day.
- **Get out of the house**
Having a purpose out in the world helps get your mind off tinnitus.



And there is a lot of naturally occurring sound enrichment that makes it easier to hear tinnitus.

• **Move your body**


Having some form of daily movement or exercise can help you let go of tinnitus and set the stage for healthier feelings. This might be taking a walk, stretching, yoga, strength training, or anything that feels right for you.

9 Develop a Daily Mindfulness Practice

In the health sciences, mindfulness is used to help accept and adapt to unwanted problems in our bodies and emotions, the problems physicians can't fix. Mindfulness is intended to be practiced daily and applied when needed for challenging times with tinnitus. In addition to general mindfulness, I recommend mindfulness of sound, referring to not getting swept up in negative thoughts and judgments, to specifically help

with tinnitus. A free smartphone app is available to get you started.³ Free and low-cost Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs are available online, too.^{4,5}

10 Commit to the Three Ps: Practice, Patience, Persistence

Don't expect your efforts to pay off right away. Sometimes getting active can break the cycle of distress and you may feel considerably better by the end of the day. If not, it's okay. You are making an investment in your future relief from tinnitus. 



On developing tinnitus distress in 2005, Bruce Hubbard, an experienced clinical psychologist, turned for help to the only evidence-based treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Following his recovery, Dr. Hubbard founded CBT for Tinnitus, LLC, to provide global

access to online training and coaching to people struggling with tinnitus distress and tinnitus education for professionals. He has published numerous articles and podcasts on CBT, mindfulness, and tinnitus. His webinar, Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Tinnitus, sponsored by the Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA), has received close to 400,000 views.

Dr. Hubbard is a visiting scholar at Columbia University, Teachers College, and past president of the New York City Cognitive Behavior Therapy Association (2016–2018). Additionally, he is certified in cognitive and behavioral psychology through the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). He completed his doctorate in clinical psychology at Binghamton University and his clinical internship at New York University Medical Center.

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2. B. Hubbard. (2023). Are you using old cognitive behavioral therapy methods for tinnitus: It's time to embrace today's best practices. *Tinnitus Today*, Spring 2023.
3. UCLA Mindful App
4. Online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Course, <https://palousemindfulness.com/>
5. Imagine Live Online Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Course, <https://www.imaginemindfulness.com/>

Share Your Story

Share Your Story With ATA Readers

Every day, people struggling with tinnitus turn to personal stories to understand what the future might hold. The stories are honest and don't sugarcoat the challenges and time it often takes to learn how to manage and live with tinnitus.

If you have tinnitus and/or hyperacusis, we'd like to hear from you. Please send your story to editor@ata.org by Jan. 31. Suggested word length is between 800 and 1,000 words.