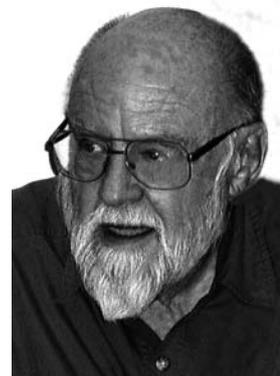


# Editorial

## Sound-Based Relief



When tinnitus maskers first became commercially available, we welcomed them as valuable new tools in our efforts to help those who suffered ceaseless, unnerving, and debilitating tinnitus. I well remember the first time I had occasion to recommend one. The client complained that his tinnitus was so maddening that he was ready to jump off a bridge, take an overdose of sleeping pills, or whatever it took to end the psychic torture of that remorseless ringing sound. He was willing to try anything, anything at all.

“I have good news for you,” I said smoothly. “Here is a new device that may provide the relief you so desperately need. It’s called a tinnitus masker. It drowns out that annoying ringing with a soothing noise. It’s like the sound of the surf. Many people with problems like yours have found that it gives them substantial relief from that annoying high-pitched ring. It costs about \$300.” Then I showed him a masker and how it fit over his ear. The client paused, studied the device closely, squirmed in his chair, then finally said, “I’ll think about it.”

Thankfully, many other tinnitus sufferers have been more willing to try tinnitus maskers and have found satisfaction in their use. In this issue of *JAAA*, we learn of a further modification of the concept, the use of custom sounds instead of the usual bands of noise. Author James Henry, of the National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research, Portland VA Medical Center, introduces

us to “Sound-Based Relief.” Twenty-one individuals who complained of at least moderately annoying tinnitus rated a variety of noises and computer-generated “natural sounds” in terms of how the annoyance of each sound compared with the annoyance of the participant’s own ongoing tinnitus. Specifically, they compared the annoyance of their tinnitus alone with the overall annoyance based on hearing the sound and the tinnitus together. Interestingly, the sounds rated lowest in annoyance were two of the three computer-generated natural sounds, labeled “Nature” and “Water.” These two sounds were characterized by greater dynamic changes in amplitude over short-term intervals than conventional noise bands. Henry suggests that “specially designed ‘dynamic’ tinnitus-relief sounds are more effective than the use of filtered bands of noise.”

Carried to its logical conclusion, this concept could provide personalized tinnitus relief. Through the magic of digital signal processing, short messages tailored to the particulars of the user’s interests, hobbies, and lifestyle can be imagined. The concept has our ringing endorsement.

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