

Neuromonics Tinnitus Treatment

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Neuromonics is the buzzword of the moment in the tinnitus world. Over the years we have seen different trends to treat tinnitus, some more successful than others. Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) has been one of the most successful approaches used for the last 8 years. Unfortunately however, like other therapies, it has not been the solution for every tinnitus sufferer, therefore other forms of tinnitus treatment continue to emerge.

What is the Neuromonics tinnitus treatment?

The Neuromonics tinnitus treatment is based on an auditory desensitisation protocol developed by Australian audiologist Dr Paul Davis. It is in agreement with the neurophysiological tinnitus model developed by Dr Pavel Jastreboff on which Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) was based upon. It uses similar principles to TRT.

The Neuromonics treatment also comprises of two components: auditory therapy and counselling, which are used to address the auditory, psychological and neurological aspects of tinnitus. The aim of the treatment is to provide habituation to the tinnitus signal by removing distress and disturbance.

An important difference is that the auditory therapy component of Neuromonics is customised for each individual hearing and tinnitus characteristics and not a “one size fits all” approach like the noise generators used in TRT.

This customisation provides a more effective way of retraining the auditory neuro-pathways to reduce awareness and disturbance leading to tinnitus habituation. Non-customised noise generators may produce auditory signals that an individual hearing system may not be able to detect therefore no effect will be obtained.

Why did I get involved with the Neuromonics treatment?

As an Audiologist, I have assessed and treated hundreds of tinnitus patients over the last 25 years. I worked for 10 years as a director and audiologist at St Vincent’s Hearing & Balance Centre – incorporating the Tinnitus Clinic. During that time I used different approaches to assess and treat patients with tinnitus with a varied rate of success.

In September 2003 I started my own independent audiology practice in Bondi Junction, Sydney. The mission of the new clinic was to offer independent and unbiased cutting edge techniques and technology in all aspects of audiology.

Around the same time I was introduced to Neuromonics CEO Dr Peter Hanley, by the head of Audiology at Macquarie University Professor Phillip Newall. After 10 years “in the making”, Neuromonics was looking at launching a new tinnitus treatment in Sydney.

For the previous 10 years audiologist and inventor of the treatment, Dr Paul Davis had been developing the technique as part of his PhD study at Curtin University in Western Australia. The treatment had been submitted to several clinical trials, the last one conducted at Macquarie University.

I had known Dr Paul Davis for more than 10 years. Paul had tinnitus and became interested in the field in an attempt to find relief for himself. I had last spoken to Paul at length when he came to see me in 1995 at St Vincent’s Tinnitus clinic. He was then researching for different models used by other clinics to assess and treat tinnitus.

When I met Neuromonics CEO Dr Peter Hanley and he introduced me to the concept of the auditory desensitisation protocol (ADP) developed by Paul Davies, I was most interested. I read all the research papers and was pleased to find out that for the first time a tinnitus treatment had been put through clinical trials before made available to the public. The results were good. Soon after, Paul came to Sydney from Western Australia, now as the Chief Scientific Officer of Neuromonics. We met again and had long and interesting discussions about his tinnitus treatment.

Neuromonics was emerging as a new company at the same time as my new clinic. We had similar visions and common interest. The treatment results presented by reputable sources were encouraging.

It seemed logical to me to embrace the new treatment as part of my clinical repertoire. In May 2004 I became the first independent audiologist to provide the Neuromonics tinnitus treatment at my practice in Bondi Junction.

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What are the clinical results 12 months later?

It has been very satisfying to work with Neuromonics. The company has proved to be extremely professional and supportive. The welfare of the patients going through the treatment has been their absolute first priority. The support given to the clinician has also been outstanding. I went through extensive training before becoming accredited to provide the treatment.

To date I have 5 patients who have completed the treatment and another 15 going through it. The process takes an average of 6 months to complete. It is not a cure for tinnitus, as it has never claimed to be. Like other medical treatments, it is not suitable for every patient. A thorough audiological assessment is mandatory prior to deciding the appropriate treatment for each individual tinnitus case.

My patients who have completed the treatment showed excellent results. After following the treatment for 6 months they were no longer disturbed by their tinnitus and regained their quality of life. Most of the patients who are undergoing the treatment are showing very positive progress. It takes longer to complete for some cases depending on their individual issues.

Two patients unfortunately have dropped-out as they could not fit the treatment in their daily lives. It takes commitment on the part of the patient to go through the whole process with the support of the audiologist. The treatment involves listening to the customised sound processor (built according to the patient's hearing and tinnitus profile) for a minimum of 2 hours a day together with face to face and telephone counselling with the audiologist.

Neuromonics is not the only form of tinnitus treatment adopted at my clinic. Each individual case requires specific approaches. After 12 months experience with the new treatment, I continue to have no hesitation to recommend it to those patients who meet the suitability criteria.

Why is this treatment so expensive?

As an audiologist in private practice I do believe the cost of the Neuromonics tinnitus treatment to the patient is high but not prohibitive for most. The typical cost of the treatment is roughly equivalent to the cost of a pair of digital hearing aids.

Unfortunately very few health treatments are still available free of charge in this country. Any form of one to one therapy for chronic condition is costly. Psychological counselling, physiotherapy and speech therapy for example, may cost thousands of dollars for some people who need to go through years of weekly treatment to achieve results.

Medicare and private health funds still do not provide a rebate for the Neuromonics tinnitus treatment.

The fee received by the audiologist to provide this treatment is no different than the average hourly rate earned by any audiologist in private practice.

Substantial part of the cost is related to R&D (research and development) of the processor. The treatment was developed based on 10 years of full-time research. Venture capitalists invested millions of dollars to make it clinically available.

Scientists, lawyers, accountants amongst other professionals were employed to seek and receive a patent, TGA and FDA approval. Marketing and advertising of the treatment also increases the price. Unfortunately, these costs need to be recovered and paid by the end user.

We hope that growing credibility based on the success we have seen so far will increase the numbers of patients going through the treatment and therefore reduce the cost in the near future.

Does this treatment help tinnitus in Ménière's disease?

Every individual is different and the characteristic of Ménière's disease also varies between different people.

It is always worthwhile going through an assessment to identify individual's suitability to tinnitus treatment.

As a rule of thumb however most people with Ménière's disease will not be suitable for the Neuromonics treatment, and there are basic two reasons for that:

1. The Neuromonics sound processor can only be programmed to suit hearing losses up to 50dB.
2. The Neuromonics treatment requires stable hearing levels.

In the first and second stages of Ménière's disease the hearing loss is usually better than 50dB but not stable - it fluctuates - some days it is better than others.

In the third stage of Ménière's disease the hearing no longer fluctuates, it remains stable at a level around 60-70 dB and therefore outside the hearing range the Neuromonics processor can be programmed for. ■

