

# I Couldn't Escape the Noise

At 30, she was struck by the miseries of tinnitus. Five doctors told her she was going deaf, but **Donna Raskin** was determined to save her hearing.

I would have done anything to make the noise go away. It was like a tornado roaring between my ears. I didn't understand where it came from, and I could not figure out how to make it stop...

It had all started about eight weeks ago. I'd always been deaf in my right ear, but perfect hearing in my left had made up for the loss. Oh, sure, if I slept on my left side, a train could run next to my bed and I wouldn't hear it. Other than that, however, I'd never felt like I was missing much – except stereo.

Then one afternoon, while I was talking with a coworker, a noise exploded in my left ear. My hearing had disappeared, and in its place was this terrifying cacophony. I shook my head, hitting my ear as if water had seeped in. Then, growing a little frantic, I tried to pop my ears by yawning. No luck. I went home, hoping a nap and some aspirin would help.

It didn't. A week passed and the roar was still with me.

I am a health writer, so I had all the resources I needed to research my problem. I soon realized I had tinnitus, a condition that causes a constant buzzing or ringing in the ear. I learned that it has many triggers; overexposure to loud noises, a severe infection, excess wax, even a tumor. I had no idea what had brought on *my* problem, but I drew some comfort in the knowledge that I was not alone. I discovered that tinnitus strikes one in five Americans, in degrees ranging from nuisance to a nightmare.

The Noise was my constant companion for two months. My job, my friends, my ballet classes, my dates – in short, virtually my whole life – began to take a backseat to the roar. The five doctors I saw did little to help. They all said the same thing: I had lost partial hearing in my good ear, which had somehow brought on the secondary problem of the Noise. Their monologues went something like this: “Sorry. You're going deaf. Oh, well. Just try to relax.”

## Tinnitus strikes one in five Americans

I was 30 years old, and I couldn't go to parties or listen to music or talk on the phone. I couldn't even chat with friends, and the Noise made it almost impossible to continue writing. I tried to will myself to think about a book, the weather, or a movie, but the Noise would always break through. And as this sound became louder inside my head, a new personality emerged. I was no longer healthy Donna, sexy Donna. I was Donna who was sick, Donna who heard a noise in her head, Donna who wasn't getting better. It was a Donna I didn't want to be.

Finally, after the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), the ultrasounds, the complete physical, the psychotherapy sessions, I asked myself if the answer to my problems might not lie outside conventional medicine. And then suddenly, I thought about acupuncture. I knew my problem was nerve-related and acupuncture works with the nervous system. It was worth a try anyway.

A few days later, I was detailing my entire health history to licensed acupuncturist Chris Trahan, O.M.D. (Oriental medicine doctor). Chris was immediately sympathetic. He spent an hour asking about my general health, how the weather affects me, and which times of the day I felt most energetic. Since the Noise hadn't existed two months before the visit, he suggested that something must have changed inside me – physically, emotionally, or both. Together, we could make other changes, he said. Then the Noise would disappear. It was the first time I had heard those words.

Chris placed three fingers on the radial pulse of my wrist to help make his diagnosis. Acupuncture is based on the belief that energy moves through the body in channels, or meridians. When the energy flow is disrupted or blocked, illness results. Stimulating points along the meridians with acupuncture needles helps regulate the flow. This mind/body approach made sense to me, since the Noise affected my moods and thinking as well as my energy level.

Chris's conclusion: excess energy in the liver and deficient energy in the kidney, imbalances he would correct. I felt understood, empowered. Chris seemed to think tinnitus was a manifestation of something going on both in my life and in my body. Together, we would figure out what it was.

To my surprise, Christ didn't put needles in my ears but along a pathway that stretched the length of my body, touching my feet, legs, torso, arms, and even my head. The pain was not unlike biting your lip. Sudden. Strong. Over.

Chris's treatment didn't stop with acupuncture. He had me cut dairy products out of my diet, which made me feel better. He also prescribed a special blend of Chinese herbs because my problem was specific to *me* and couldn't be treated with ready-made medicine. It worked so well I took it long after my acupuncture treatments had stopped.

As I had been warned, the Noise did not disappear after the first treatment, but it did go away right after the second one a few days later. It came back a day or so after that, then vanished again – and so far it has not returned. I did have a few other acupuncture treatments, but only as a kind of insurance. By that time, my mood and concentration had improved. Yes, I felt like my old self: happy, strong, and in control.

I do seem to have lost some hearing in my good ear, which is what probably brought on the Noise in the first place, but the loss is only noticeable when I'm in a crowd and trying to listen to one person. Other than that, things are fine.

I learned an important lesson from this experience: Ultimately my health rests in my own hands, and I must entrust it only to those who believe and think as I do. Together, Chris and I reached our common goals: my good health – and Quiet.

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#### For More on Tinnitus

The American Tinnitus Association estimates that 50 million people experience tinnitus to some degree in their lifetime. Of that number, some 12 million have it severely enough to seek medical attention. Hearing aids, noise masking devices, drug therapy, and biofeedback can provide relief; alternative treatments include acupuncture, hypnosis, myotherapy, chiropractic care, naturopathy, and allergy control. For more information, contact the American Tinnitus Association, P.O. Box 5, Portland OR 97207 (508-248-9985). To locate an acupuncturist, call the American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine in Catasauqua, PA; 610-443-2488.