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Could this device be a cure for tinnitus? iPod-style gadget 'cuts ringing in the ears by up to 50%'

By [Jenny Hope](#)

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An iPod-like device could help thousands of tinnitus sufferers ease the chronic ringing in their ears, scientists claim.

Three out of four patients who tried out the device, which plays sounds tuned to the frequency of their tinnitus, experienced a reduction in their symptoms for several months.

The treatment is designed to 'switch off' the over-active nerve cells within the hearing area of the sufferer's brain.



Breakthrough: This iPod-like device could help thousands of tinnitus sufferers ease the chronic ringing in their ears, scientists have claimed

The device, which costs £4,000, plays a series of tones tuned exactly to the frequency of the ringing in their ears. Scientists say this somehow stops the over-active nerve cells from firing, easing the constant noise.

Professor Peter Tass, the German inventor of the Coordinated Reset (CR) device, has published the first evidence that it works in the journal *Restorative Neurology & Neuroscience*.

His trial involved 63 tinnitus patients, who wore the portable device with headphones for 12 weeks.

Some had the device switched on for only an hour a day, while others listened to it for four to six hours. Five patients were given 'dummy' sounds through the headphones.

Before the trial started the participants were given tests and scored on the severity of their symptoms. Some had had the condition for more than four years.

Three-quarters of the patients who heard the 'real' sounds experienced a drop in symptoms and loudness, with a 50 per cent reduction on average.



Unpleasant: Around one in seven Britons have at some point suffered from tinnitus, the medical name for hearing ringing, buzzing or whistling noises inside the head

Those who wore the device for up to six hours a day saw the best results. There was no change for patients hearing 'dummy' sounds.

The benefits continued for four weeks after the patients stopped using the device and during ten months of follow-up treatment when they used it for maintenance therapy.

Professor Tass, from the Juelich Research Centre in Germany, said it was an 'exploratory' study.

He said the objective was to establish whether the treatment was a safe and viable way of reducing the loudness, annoyance and severity of symptoms.

The researchers also investigated changes in brain waves in the areas associated with tinnitus, he said, discovering a reversal of the patterns linked to the disorder when patients used the device.

Around one in seven Britons have at some point suffered from tinnitus, the medical name for hearing ringing, buzzing or whistling noises inside the head.

Long-term problems affect an estimated 600,000 people, with many experiencing sleep deprivation and an inability to concentrate.

There is no cure, but sound therapy may relieve distress. Background music or nature sounds are often used to make the tinnitus less intrusive, while cognitive behavioural therapy can help the patient to adjust the way they think about it.

The CR device appears to work for those with chronic tonal tinnitus, which is mainly ringing in the ears, rather than patients with atonal tinnitus, or 'white noise'.

Mark Williams, principal scientific audiologist at the private Tinnitus Clinic in London, which is already offering the treatment, said the trial results were 'extremely encouraging'.

'As the first treatment for tinnitus to remove rather than mask symptoms, clinical evidence of safety and efficacy will hopefully open up this treatment to a wider range of patients,' he said.

'The science of CR stimulation was initially developed in order to reduce neural synchrony in neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's disease, via deep brain electrode stimulation.

'The technology developed for tinnitus treatment involves patients wearing headphones that play a series of tones modelled around the characteristic frequency of their tinnitus.

'Patients wear the device for four to six hours a day initially. It is designed not to block out other sound so they can carry on with their normal routine and treatment lasts for approximately nine months.'

Josephine Swinhoe, the clinic's managing director, said it hoped to persuade the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence to back the treatment on the NHS.

She said 'We are funding a further UK trial at Nottingham University to repeat the German study in a larger patient group and are about to request a Nice review of the treatment method with the aim of making it more widely available.'

David Stockdale, of the British Tinnitus Association, said 'The results of this exploratory first trial are interesting and encouraging. The findings now need to be replicated by an independent research group.

'A randomised-controlled trial is required to assess whether this new intervention is a viable and effective treatment for tinnitus patients. We look forward to seeing the results of the planned larger scale phase two trial.'

Professor Tass will discuss his research at a conference in London tomorrow.

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Untill any device is proven it must have good solid trials with certified figures to back it up, this device has none, so waste your money if you want, there is help out there just look in the right direction, Tinnitus is a horrible condition, you only have to see what sufferes have said in this forum, so jest not ye who don't know.

- geoff riches, great yarmouth. norfolk, 19/3/2012 19:06

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I have had debilitating tinnitus for 4 years and no mechanical device has been able to help me. It's the cruellist, cruellist condition and I wish I was dead.

- Alison, UK, 19/3/2012 17:54

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When I saw the price my ears started to ring

- big bucks , lincoln U K, 19/3/2012 17:25

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To everyone bemoaning the reported cost it is indeed high but I doubt it would remain that expensive if production was increased when it has proved itself. Furthermore it doesnt look as though it is a permanent fixture but a treatment over a fixed period of time. It could therefore be provided on loan for short periods.

- anon, London, 19/3/2012 17:15

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I'd love to see a cure for my tinnitus but a £4000 device that does no more than listening to white noise isn't for me I'm afraid. I'll just leave a TV or radio on. So many frequencies in a simple piece of music that I'm fairly sure my tinnitus will be relieved by it in part. I'm no doctor, but I know what works for me.

- Sean Boon, Hampshire, 19/3/2012 16:28

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