

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



A Side Benefit of Gym Membership

We all get a lot out of our exercising here at the Fit Center, but we can also take advantage of a big side benefit – sharing our problems in our adventure in aging.

Take Pat for instance. Last spring Pat noticed that she was hearing a constant chirping sound. After some intense internet research, Pat identified what she thought she was experiencing, **tinnitus**, the perception of sound in the absence of a corresponding external sound. According to the Mayo Clinic, tinnitus (TIN-i-tus) affects about 1 in 5 people. (See <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/tinnitus>.)

Pat's not really sure how and exactly when this started; at some point it reached a level to become annoying. It could have been present for a long time, but at too low a level to be noticed. It could have been triggered when Pat took a bunch of Ibuprofen to relieve a slight back sprain. One thing is certain, after Pat's back recovered and she resumed her one-aspirin-a-day regimen, her tinnitus got a lot worse.

Pat had read that aspirin can sometimes cause tinnitus, and that coffee, chocolate, and wine (enjoyable elements of our lifestyle) can sometimes make it worse. So she experimented by reducing her coffee, chocolate, and wine intake – with no noticeable affect on the chirping. Eliminating the aspirin, however, helped a lot.

An examination and tests by a hearing specialist did not uncover any medical causes for Pat's tinnitus. Pat had always been bothered by loud noises and suffers from a slight hearing loss. That, plus increasing age, and her sensitivity to aspirin, remain the most likely triggers and amplifiers of the constant low-level chirping that still persists. We'll probably never know the whole story.

Over several weeks Pat learned that many of her friends suffered from tinnitus, some for decades, and most did not ever determine a cause.

Pat declares that her tinnitus is “tolerable” during daytime because the annoying chirping is masked by normal activities and background sounds. Trying to sleep in the quiet of nighttime is the real tough part.

Pat was discussing this with Sandy Allen while treadmilling side-by-side in the Weight Room and found out that Sandy's husband also experienced tinnitus and sleep deprivation. Sandy told Pat that they used a device that played soothing sounds to successfully mask her husband's tinnitus.

We found a good selection of “sound spas” at Bed, Bath, and Beyond. Pat chose one that plays the sounds of “rain,” “summer night,” “waterfall,” “heartbeat,” “ocean,” or “rainforest.” The first night, we tried all of the sounds and quickly selected “rain” as the pleasant, steady background that really helped Pat get a restful sleep. The “rainfall” doesn't bother me in the least; I can pretend that the rain is doing some good in the yard.

So far Pat has adapted well to her tinnitus – ignoring it during the day and using the sound machine at bedtime. We even took the “rain” with us on a trip to Ruidoso, New Mexico this summer. The pleasant background noise not only helped Pat sleep, but also masked the noise that children were making in the condo room above ours.

So share your problems with others; there may be an answer for you on the adjacent treadmill. Thanks Sandy!