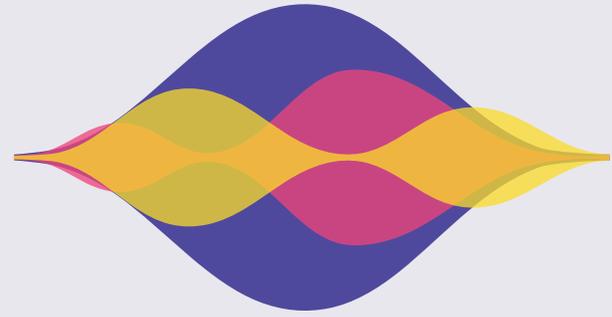# An Assessment of Tinnitus Apps

Summary by John A. Coverstone, AuD

A common tool in the treatment of tinnitus is sound therapy. Sounds may be presented through a variety of devices, but mobile apps for this purpose are growing in popularity and number. Some mobile apps may also be used for relaxation or other exercises to help cope with tinnitus. Researchers at the National Institute for Health Research in the United Kingdom recently conducted a survey of mobile app use for tinnitus and subsequently analyzed the apps people indicated using.[1]

Of a total of 643 people completing the online survey, 75 percent indicated that they did not use apps for tinnitus. There was a significant correlation between people reporting severe tinnitus and non-use of mobile apps. The majority of people indicating they did not use mobile apps cited being unaware that mobile apps existed for tinnitus. Other reasons included lack of comfort with technology, not believing an app would help their tinnitus, and not having a device that supported apps.

From the results of those who used mobile apps, the authors created a list of 18 apps that more than one person had tried for tinnitus. Apps fell into six main categories: sound generation; meditation & mindfulness; information & education; hypnosis; relaxation; and assessment. Quality of the apps was also rated using the Mobile Apps Rating Scale, a tool designed for health-related mobile apps.[2] Scores ranged from 1.6 to 4.2 out of a possible 5, with two apps failing to meet the minimum acceptable rating of 3.0.

Sound therapy was the most common use and included a variety of strategies, such as sound enrichment, masking, notched music, binaural beats, and isochronic tones (regular beats of a single tone used for brain entrainment). The authors noted that six apps were specifically designed for tinnitus, four apps mentioned tinnitus as a use, and eight apps made no mention of tinnitus (nature sounds, relaxation, hypnosis).

The authors concluded from this survey that mobile apps are being used for tinnitus management, but mostly without direction from a healthcare professional. Apps are primarily used as a self-help tool. The authors recommended that future research should consider the place of mobile apps in tinnitus management.

1 Sereda, M., Smith, S., Newton, K., & Stockdale, D. (2019). Mobile apps for management of tinnitus: Users' survey, quality assessment, and content analysis. *JMIR mHealth and uHealth, 7*(1), e10353.

2 Stoyanov, S. R., Hides, L., Kavanagh, D. J., Zelenko, O., Tjondronegoro, D., & Mani, M. (2015). Mobile App Rating Scale: A new tool for assessing the quality of health mobile apps. *JMIR mHealth and uHealth, 3*(1), e27.

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— Jan P.