

Breakthrough in search for tinnitus cure by New Zealand

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University of Auckland scientists are excited by results from a trial of a new treatment for tinnitus



After 20 years searching for a cure for tinnitus, researchers at the University of Auckland in New Zealand are excited by 'encouraging results' from a clinical trial of a mobile-phone-based therapy. The study randomised 61 patients to one of two treatments, the prototype of the new 'digital polytherapeutic' or a popular self-help app producing white noise.

Tinnitus, a common problem, is when you experience ringing or other noises in one or both of your ears.

On average, the group with the polytherapeutic (31 people) showed clinically significant improvements at 12 weeks, while the other group (30 people) did not. "This is more significant than some of our earlier work and is likely to have a direct impact on future treatment of tinnitus," Associate Professor in Audiology Grant Searchfield says.

Key to the new treatment is an initial assessment by an audiologist who develops the personalised treatment plan, combining a range of digital tools, based on the individual's experience of tinnitus.

There is no pill that can cure tinnitus. "What this therapy does is essentially rewire the brain in a way that de-emphasises the sound of the tinnitus to a background noise that has no meaning or relevance to the listener," Dr Searchfield says.

Audiology research fellow Dr Phil Sanders says the results are exciting and he found running the trial personally rewarding.

The next step will be to refine the prototype and proceed to larger local and international trials with a view to FDA approval. The researchers hope the app will be clinically available in around six months.