Internet-based intervention for tinnitus: Outcome of the pilot study

Eldré Beukes, Peter Allen, Vinaya Manchaiah, David Baguley and Gerhard Andersson

Executive Summary

The aim of this study was to pilot whether using an Internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Intervention (iCBT) as a form of tinnitus therapy would be a practical treatment option in the UK. The results indicated that iCBT is feasible in the UK and effective at reducing tinnitus distress and sleep problems and that further larger scaled studies should proceed.

Introduction

Experiencing tinnitus can lead to adverse consequences such as sleep problems, anxiety and depression, which may negatively affect relationships and the ability to work. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a psychological intervention aimed at altering maladaptive responses to tinnitus through behavioural modifications, has the most evidence of effectiveness at reducing tinnitus distress. Despite positive outcomes associated with the use of CBT for tinnitus, there remains limited accessibility, largely due to a shortage of trained clinicians to provide CBT for tinnitus. One potential solution to overcome current barriers is using the Internet to deliver treatment. The aims of this research were to pilot the feasibility and effectiveness of iCBT on tinnitus distress and on tinnitus related comorbidities.

Methods

This initial small-scale study included 37 participants with a range of different educational and employment backgrounds as well as varying tinnitus experiences. There were similar numbers of males and females and a wide age range of participants were drawn to the study. Of the 37

participants who started the study, five withdrew and 29 completed the post-intervention questionnaire.

Results

The extent to which participants actively engaged and interacted with the resources provided by this iCBT intervention was highly variable. On average 71% of the modules were read.

Tinnitus severity and insomnia were significantly better following the intervention. For the other outcome measures, the pre-intervention scores were mild, and therefore improvement would be unlikely. A higher initial score for tinnitus distress, lead to a better eventual outcome. No other factors were found to contribute to the outcome, including age, gender, tinnitus duration, educational level and employment status.

Participants were monitored on a weekly basis and data suggest it takes around 6 weeks of intervention before positive effects are seen.

Participants rated the intervention highly with an average rating of 85.5%.

Conclusions

iCBT for tinnitus in the UK is feasible and effectiveness has been shown in this pilot study. Improvements have been made based on this study and larger scaled studies are underway.

Full results can be requested once published. Reference: Beukes et al. Internet-based Intervention for tinnitus: results from an open effectiveness study. JAAA. In revision.