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London woman suffers the "aural equivalent of headlight dazzle"

Ngaire Lowndes of London has suffered from a constant high frequency ringing sound in her ears for four years.

/24-7PressRelease/ - Sheffield, UK, July 12, 2008 - Ngaire Lowndes of London has suffered from a constant high frequency ringing sound in her ears for four years. It gets worse in the evening when she is trying to relax and also when she is stressed, tired or angry, and particularly when she is exposed to any loud noise. Ngaire thinks that the tinnitus may be a result of her former occupation; she was a freelance legal secretary and paralegal, but had to give it up when she became unable to undertake even short-term assignments due to the hearing fatigue caused by the heavy load of audio-typing that is the legal secretary's lot.

"It's not just hearing a voice in your ears for eight hours a day that does the damage, but actively listening, deciphering and then typing dictation, which is not always clearly or consistently delivered. I've worked for solicitors who were so horrendously bad at maintaining a consistent volume of dictation, who mumbled or shouted, or simply spoke very badly, that I would have to listen to phrases three or four times over just to understand what they were trying to say. Multiply that to fill a working day, and are you surprised that tinnitus is extremely common in older legal secretaries?"

"I used to work in central London and was very accustomed to the rhythm of the city, but now I have no confidence in coping with it. I'm lucky that I can now work from home, but have had to accept a huge drop in income," explains 53-year-old linguistics consultant, Ngaire. "I've had to give up other things too: I used to sing in a large choir, which I loved, but the sound levels generated in performance overwhelmed my hearing. I couldn't pitch my voice accurately or hear what I was supposed to be singing. As a classically trained singer and musician, this was a big loss." It is a long time since Ngaire has been to a concert or to the theatre in London, not only because of the noise during shows, but also because of the strain of getting there and back.

She also misses playing the piano - even such a pleasant sound causes problems for her ears.

"I actively avoid gatherings now, where the noise will be above a certain level. I have a friend's wedding coming up, but after the ceremony and the meal - when the disco starts - I'll have to leave, because even if it's music that I love, my ears will ring tenfold for days afterwards. It's like the aural equivalent of headlight dazzle; loud music becomes a blur of sound," said Ngaire.

Ngaire has had a hearing test at her local audiology department where it was confirmed that she had no hearing loss but that she definitely had tinnitus. The advice was to avoid loud noise wherever possible and so she has invested in some earplugs. No support or treatment was offered and Ngaire was told by a sympathetic audiologist that nothing could be done to cure the tinnitus. The ringing does stop completely when she is swimming underwater, but this is not exactly a practical solution to the problem. Ngaire welcomes the idea of more research being carried out to develop new methods of treatment. "Keep scouting round and testing anything, however loopy it seems - something, someday, must work," she urges. "It would also be valuable for non-afflicted people to realise that tinnitus is exhausting. It takes away your concentration and makes going out anywhere a tiring ordeal," she adds.

"I've become quite a hermit compared to my previous life and there's really nothing I can do about it. I greatly miss listening to music and taking part in it, and I tend to communicate with the world via email. I'm not at all deaf - quite the opposite, but I often have to ask people to repeat themselves. If conversations aren't short and purposeful, I have difficulty focusing on them."

Deafness Research UK is the country's only charity dedicated to finding new cures, treatments and technologies for the deaf, hard of hearing and other hearing impaired people including tinnitus sufferers.

Vivienne Michael, Chief Executive of Deafness Research UK, said: "Nearly five million people in the UK are affected by tinnitus and it can have a devastating effect on their quality of life. Not enough is known about this very complex condition and we are determined to do something about it. We are committed to funding leading edge research and providing

practical information to health professionals for the benefit of sufferers," she added.

'Deafness Research UK has produced a useful guide called 'Managing Tinnitus'. To receive a copy telephone 0808 808 2222 or email info@deafnessresearch.org.uk. For information on research into deafness and other hearing conditions, log on to the website, www.deafnessresearch.org.uk'
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