

WHY I...

use sound therapy



All her life, Katy Fitzgerald has suffered from "aeroplane ear". "On and off, my right ear would have a sensation of being blocked, like when you are on a plane. If I was in a crowded room sometimes it would be difficult to hear."

The problem was most frustrating when it prevented her from singing. "It sounded like my voice was going round in my head."

After treatment from several ear specialists, homeopathy and even ear ventilation tubes failed, Fitzgerald heard about sound therapy from her GP. She sought out the Rosebery branch of Sound Therapy International, an organisation that produces special listening tapes that are supposed to help problems ranging from hearing loss to insomnia.

"It's a series of four tapes of music by Bach and Mozart, but they have done something to it - every now and then there are high-pitched squeaky sounds. The music is at a really low volume, so it's kind of subliminal. You have to listen for at least three hours a day but it's at such a low level, I can put it on at the movies or have a totally normal conversation with someone," says Fitzgerald.

After three months, says Fitzgerald, her ear problems had all but disappeared. "It was 98 per cent clear. I probably do it once a week these days, but I know that if I leave it, my ear will get blocked again."

Fitzgerald says the treatment has ended a lifetime of frustration. "It's made a really big difference for me. I always had good hearing but just had this echo. Now I can feel comfortable singing again."

EXPERT VIEW

Professor William Noble, head of the School of Psychology at the University of New England and a specialist in the psycho-social effects of hearing impairment:

"There are various things on the market for treatment of problems like tinnitus, including filtered music and soothing everyday noises. I know that some people who suffer from tinnitus find these signals offer them some relief, but I would be very cautious before suggesting that listening to taped sounds will somehow improve hearing. It would strike me as quite improbable that there would be some miraculous cure through listening to sound."

Interviews: Sundanda Creagh