

ABSTRACTS

Hilary Hodgson Hilary Hodgson is mother to a son affected by severe autism. He is currently 13 years old and over the last few years has become increasingly sensitive to sound. In collaboration with Dr Josephine Marriage and Dr Lesley Batchelor a solution emerged using tinnitus masker technology. Hilary is a registered nurse currently working in Sexual Health services in the NHS. Together with her scientist husband she offers an interesting perspective on the treatment of hyperacusis in Autism.

The autistic child with Hyperacusis – a parent's perspective

While hyperacusis combined with autism can be a debilitating condition the use of tinnitus maskers has been shown to be effective. This paper follows the progress of a child exhibiting both severe autism and hyperacusis following the introduction of various therapies aimed at addressing the sound sensitivity. In this instance the use of tinnitus maskers was found to be the only effective therapy.

The use of these maskers has significantly reduced his sound sensitivity making a substantial improvement in his quality of life. It has allowed the child to access new environments with less regard to the level of ambient noise, to further integrate into society. It has freed up his hands by removing them from the need to cover his ears allowing him to further access education and leisure pursuits. Overall the effect is to reduce his anxiety and stress levels and the therapy therefore continues.

Parent's perspective of using maskers for Hyperacusis

While hyperacusis combined with autism can be a debilitating condition the use of tinnitus maskers has been shown to be effective. This paper follows the progress of a child exhibiting both severe autism and hyperacusis following the introduction of various therapies aimed at addressing the sound sensitivity. In this instance the use of tinnitus maskers was found to be the only effective therapy.

The child is currently 12 years old and was diagnosed as having severe autism age 3. By the age of 5 he was exhibiting increasing sensitivity to sound, particularly from smaller children, animals and mechanical devices.

In early years a listening programme was attempted but proved to be ineffective. By the age of 7 the child was needing noise reduction headphones to venture outdoors (in all but the quietest environments) these proved effective as did standard industrial ear defenders. However, as these devices isolated child from environment they posed an impediment to his social integration, classroom learning and speech development. Given that autism is predominantly a communication disorder this was not a satisfactory therapy.

In 2006 under the guidance of Dr Josephine Marriage Clinical Scientist (Audiology) Research Associate University of Cambridge and with the management of Dr Lesley Batchelor Consultant Community Paediatrician (Audiology) East Cheshire NHS Trust, the use of tinnitus maskers was trialled. The aims were to use these devices to reduce the child's acute sound sensitivity and to re-train the brain over the longer term to accept a wider range and volume of sounds without the resulting anxiety and stress.

The use of the tinnitus maskers proved to be highly effective. They make access to new environments possible and allowed the child to return to activities that had become inaccessible due to increasing sound sensitivity. Their use continues through the transition from day placement in primary education to a residential secondary placement.

From a parental perspective the use of this equipment has made a highly significant contribution to the education, social interaction and general wellbeing of this child. Their use has also been recognised as effective by the schools and residential accommodation accessed by the child. As a result we would recommend that their use should be considered in cases of combined autism and hyperacusis.