

How to Stop Humming in 28 Days

A Simple Stepped Programme



A Tigronev Short Guide

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Tigroney Short Guides

First Published in 2017
by Tigroney Press
Avoca
Co. Wicklow

Typeset by Tigroney Press

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9957319-1-2 (ebook)

Introduction

Why humming is good for us

Humming occurs in all cultures and societies, and is considered not only one of the oldest, but an important evolutionary element in human communication. Humming is something that everyone can do. Of course there will always be someone who will claim not to be able to hum. Humbug! For most of us it's intuitive and we will have been happily humming since late infancy; but just in case you don't know, this is how to do it. Start by singing a note which means that your mouth is open. It can be any note but preferably one that is in your middle range, not too high or too low. Now close your mouth while singing that note. As your lips close the sound can no longer escape through your mouth, instead it will cause a vibration that will emerge as a sound emanating from your nose. That is humming, channelling the vibration of your vocal cords through your sinuses and out via your nasal passageway. So unlike singing, humming is through the nose with the mouth closed, severely restricting the tonal variation possible and resulting in a resonating monotone sound.

So everyone can, and in practice the vast majority of us do, hum. Some people sing, others whistle, but generally we all hum a couple of times every day. Singers and actors often use humming as a method of warming up their voice prior to a performance, thus reducing the possibility of straining their vocal cords. However, humming has a lot more going for it than just a warm up exercise and has been shown to be good for both your mental and physical health. Humming helps you focus, can help reduce stress, make you happier and at the same time improve the airflow through your sinuses and nasal cavity keeping them healthy. The airflow is improved due to the turbulence of the air created by humming, dramatically increasing the airflow thereby reducing the risk of blockage and infection.

Meditation practices include both chant and humming. One popular example is brahmari or bee breath meditation which is widely used for reducing anxiety and inducing calmness. It has been recommended for sufferers of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) the theory being that humming interrupts intrusive thoughts and even help manage panic attacks. This kind of meditation is also used in some areas in Asia to reduce anxiety, where it is also used to help in pain control during labour in pregnancy. The use of the popular chant 'om' which ends in a prolonged hum is known to reduce stress and the effect of depression, which may be due to stimulating the vagus nerve which sends electrical signals to key areas of the brain. Why is this? Professor Joseph Jordania from the University of Melbourne believes that the origin of humming dates back to the earliest hominids, who used it as a method of *contact calling* which are sounds made by many different social animal groups to reassure other members of the group that they are safe from predators and so can relax. In this case complete silence indicates danger. Professor Jordania believes that humming is hardwired into our psychology, so that it instinctively has a relaxing effect on ourselves and in theory others.

Clapping to show appreciation is a relatively recent phenomenon, with audiences before 1700 generally showing their appreciation by humming. We still use humming as part of our language, especially when we are talking on the phone or intimately with someone; positive expressions such as “mmm” and “mmmh”, although other humming expressions such as “ah-huh”, “umh”, “ummmm” and “Hmm” may invoke a note of scepticism.

In a survey carried out by staff at the London Zoo in 2008, 67.7% of people interviewed admitted that they hummed when they were happy, although over 50% also said that they found the sound of other people humming annoying. The survey ‘Get London Humming’ also revealed that people hum almost everywhere. Sixty-six percent hummed while listening to the radio but other popular places included in the car, walking, and while taking a shower. The most unusual humming traits were while making love (just one of the 450 participants) and while eating (3 participants)!

So humming is an inoffensive activity that has many positive aspects for mental and physical wellbeing.

Compulsive Humming

Many people hum a lot, but know that when they are outside their home, at school or at work, that it is both embarrassing and often unacceptable to others close by. However, for many people humming can be an unconscious activity, and it is this that can lead to problems both inside and outside the home. Compulsive humming is extremely annoying to those around you, especially as the tonal nature and often the volume can mean that it can be heard through walls and over quite long distances, driving partners, family and neighbours to distraction. Of course the compulsive hummer just doesn’t know when he or she is actually humming, so anywhere where you are relaxed, for example, while shopping, in restaurants or cafes, in the cinema, browsing in the library...yes in all these places if you are a compulsive hummer then you are probably humming. In the car, in the shed, well everyone hums there right, well no not in the same way a compulsive hummer does. You may think you are humming a tune, what in fact you are doing is producing a deep resonant monotone which is similar to a meditative chant without any words or meaning. You are happy, relaxed and safe, so just like our early hominid cousins probably did, you hum. So apart from knowing where you are...compulsive hummers can’t hide...there are very few positives to your humming to those around you. So compulsive humming is generally a considered a social problem.

How can you break this habit? It has been scientifically shown through various group studies that to break a habit or to make something a habit takes on average 66 days. However, it is possible to significantly reduce a habit such as humming within 28 days through some simple techniques. However, to fully remove a habit like this will take as long as three or four months, but it is possible. But just like alcoholism or gambling then it is possible to relapse back into the habit, so it has to be reinforced by having a zero tolerance once the habit has been broken. It is not easy and you have to be motivated to stop humming, and unfortunately it means stopping humming completely, forever!

The Programme

Welcome to the starting point which only involves you, the hummer, at this stage. I would also recommend that you start on this task without telling anyone because it is easy to get demoralized and pressurized. It is vitally important that you reread this programme at least every other day to reinforce what you are to do and also to review your progress. A key part of controlling humming is being aware when you are actually doing it, so by rereading this frequently will help reinforce what you are attempting to do...that is break the habitual habit of constant humming.

The programme is made up of a number of steps which are introduced to you on Days 1, 4, 7, 10, 15, 20 and finally 28 from the time you start. Each step is explained on a separate page and you are encouraged to create a simple table to chart your progress. It is probably best to start a day when you are not in work, as the first day is the most difficult. Good luck with the programme, and let us know how you get on at tigroneypress@gmail.com.

Day 1 of the Programme

Create a chart like the one below (Table 1) and tick each box daily just before you go to bed once all the steps have been completed. You are going to adopt six steps over a period of three weeks. Each step must be carried out fully and honestly. To be successful at this you have to commit yourself fully to the programme and this is going to interfere slightly with your daily routine. So we are now at day 1 and you are going to start by adopting the first two steps below.

Table 1. Tick each day to confirm that you are sticking to the plan. Red days indicate when new steps are introduced as indicated by the number.

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	✓	Monday		Monday ⁶		Monday	
Tuesday		Tuesday		Tuesday		Tuesday	
Wednesday		Wednesday ⁵		Wednesday		Wednesday	
Thursday ³		Thursday		Thursday		Thursday	
Friday		Friday		Friday		Friday	
Saturday		Saturday		Saturday ⁷		Saturday	
Sunday ⁴		Sunday		Sunday		Sunday	

- **Step 1: Every time you are aware that you are humming immediately stop and say 'I must not hum' ten times.** It is as simple as that. This exercise will be the main strategy and it does work, so give it a try. It works very much better if you say it aloud. Initially you will be doing this a lot, multiple times an hour. But you must persist and by the end of the first day you will realize that you have already reduced your humming but more importantly you have made it a conscious rather than a subconscious activity.
- **Step 2: Put up signs in personal areas to remind you.** Use the term **DNH** (i.e. Do Not Hum) and post it onto the front of your PC or laptop, your phone and the face of your wristwatch as well. Yellow post-its cut down to size are great for this. These signs have to be obvious. Renew these signs every day to reinforce the message, which should be the first task in your daily diary. It is also important to alter the position of the notices or reminders so that they are always new.

These two basic steps must be adhered to every day for the next 28 days

Almost at once you will become more aware of your own humming, but this constant interrupting your humming will tend to make you feel a little depressed, especially the first day. Remember that you hum when you are happy and fully occupied or are concentrating. So trying to stop humming will initially make you feel different. So it is important to reward yourself, and remember also that this is going to take time. The second day you will feel less stressed or depressed about pulling yourself up when you are humming and this feeling will get less each day that passes.

Day 4 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	√	Monday		Monday ⁶		Monday	
Tuesday	√	Tuesday		Tuesday		Tuesday	
Wednesday	√	Wednesday ⁵		Wednesday		Wednesday	
Thursday ³		Thursday		Thursday		Thursday	
Friday		Friday		Friday		Friday	
Saturday		Saturday		Saturday ⁷		Saturday	
Sunday ⁴		Sunday		Sunday		Sunday	

Without realizing it you will probably have reduced your humming by between 40-60% already. The problem is that you still don't know when you are doing it...it has become an unconscious action that you do everywhere especially when you are happy and relaxed and also when concentrating or doing a task which can be done when you feel calm and in control. You don't tend to hum when you are unhappy, annoyed, stressed or feeling under confident. However, what this means is that you are going to hum at home, in the garden, at work in the office and even in cafes, especially when you are on your own. If people haven't mentioned this to you then you are either a really nice person or very intimidating. But believe me you are humming.

So once you have been trying to reduce your humming using steps 1 and 2 the next stage is to try and set some physical boundaries.

- **Step 3: Create non-humming areas and make an extra special effort while in those areas.** Start with one and then slowly increase these areas to two and then three. The bathroom is probably a good place to start.

Do not exceed three areas otherwise the effect will not work.

Day 7 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	√	Monday		Monday ⁶		Monday	
Tuesday	√	Tuesday		Tuesday		Tuesday	
Wednesday	√	Wednesday ⁵		Wednesday		Wednesday	
Thursday ³	√	Thursday		Thursday		Thursday	
Friday	√	Friday		Friday		Friday	
Saturday	√	Saturday		Saturday ⁷		Saturday	
Sunday ⁴		Sunday		Sunday		Sunday	

After a week people should have noticed that you are not humming so much, and the best test of your progress is when your family mention it. The problem is that if you ask your partner to tell you when you hum, it will quickly become an issue. This is because you hum nearly all the time and will get annoyed with having it pointed out to you very quickly; and because they have lived with this annoying habit so long, they will tend to be only too happy to point out when you are humming! So this is why stopping humming has to be primarily a personal journey. So after two weeks only if you feel confident that you have significantly reduced your humming you should engage other people to assist you. Meanwhile it is time to try some other techniques first.

- **Step 4: When you are in a position where you are constantly aware that you are humming such as in the garden or the office put something in your mouth like an empty tobacco pipe.**

In fact you should go out and buy and a really handsome pipe, I am not suggesting for one minute that you should start smoking but if you are going to have a pipe why not get one that suits you. Like chewing this does not actually prevent you humming but it does help and also is a subconscious reminder to stop.

Keep up with steps 1 and 2 and don't forget to increase the number of non-humming areas to a minimum of two (one must be the bathroom or the loo).

Day 10 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	√	Monday	√	Monday ⁶		Monday	
Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday		Tuesday	
Wednesday	√	Wednesday ⁵		Wednesday		Wednesday	
Thursday ³	√	Thursday		Thursday		Thursday	
Friday	√	Friday		Friday		Friday	
Saturday	√	Saturday		Saturday ⁷		Saturday	
Sunday ⁴	√	Sunday		Sunday		Sunday	

By now two things have happened. First you have significantly reduced your daily pattern of humming and secondly you are becoming increasingly aware when you are humming. This latter part is really important. We need to bring humming from being a subconscious activity into a conscious one. So now is the time to ask for some help and ask loved ones to tell you when you are humming.

- **Step 5: Ask your partner to tell you when you are humming or to indicate that you are in some way** (I suspect hitting you over the head with a rolled up newspaper is what most spouses would like to do...so whatever helps). Each time this happens take a slow deep breath and then apologize. Remember to also say '*I must not hum*' ten times.

This is also the time to put up larger notices in areas where you may start humming, especially the bathroom, loo and your personal space such as an office or workshop. In fact any place where you are working alone is a risk area.

Day 15 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3	Week 4	
Monday^{1,2}	√	Monday	√	Monday⁶	Monday	
Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday	Tuesday	
Wednesday	√	Wednesday⁵	√	Wednesday	Wednesday	
Thursday³	√	Thursday	√	Thursday	Thursday	
Friday	√	Friday	√	Friday	Friday	
Saturday	√	Saturday	√	Saturday⁷	Saturday	
Sunday⁴	√	Sunday	√	Sunday	Sunday	

- **Step 6: Buy yourself a small notebook and pen and carry it with you everywhere. Each time you catch yourself or your partner catches you humming write down in the book, the time and place where you were humming...remember to say I must not hum 10 times when writing it down.**

This may seem arduous but in fact by now you will be humming very much less and need a stronger reinforcement not hum when you catch yourself doing it. Keep up with the other steps, especially steps 1 and 2, and don't forget to increase the number of non-humming areas to a minimum of three (one of this must also be your office...yes, you hum at the office!).

Day 20 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	√	Monday	√	Monday ⁶	√	Monday	
Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday	
Wednesday	√	Wednesday ⁵	√	Wednesday	√	Wednesday	
Thursday ³	√	Thursday	√	Thursday	√	Thursday	
Friday	√	Friday	√	Friday	√	Friday	
Saturday	√	Saturday	√	Saturday ⁷		Saturday	
Sunday ⁴	√	Sunday	√	Sunday		Sunday	

By now you should have significantly reduced the problem and are well on the way to breaking the habit. Now comes the difficult one. Money. Like all the other steps you have to be scrupulously honest with yourself if you are going to break the habit. This is a critical moment in the process because you have made great progress and made everyone's life so much better, so it is easy to think that you have cracked it and stop the programme. This is a huge mistake and this is the time you need to make an extra effort. Go over the steps again, change all the notices, and remember that to make this work you have to start working even harder... you are going to succeed if you keep onto the end.

- **Step 7: Each time you hum you have to pay a financial penalty. If your partner catches you then it goes to her or him, or if it's you then the money must go to charity.**

Make a note in the notebook, although I suspect your partner at this stage will possibly get a notebook of their own. I want you to commit to a sum that will hurt your pocket, so a euro or pound seems reasonable for anyone who is employed, however, it's up to you to set the amount but be realistic. This has got to hurt and also act as a reward as you dominate the habit. The money you owe must be paid over otherwise this is not going to work. You want to break this habit otherwise you would not have got this far. So be honest and pay up in cash right away.

Day 28 of the Programme

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4	
Monday ^{1,2}	√	Monday	√	Monday ⁶	√	Monday	√
Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√	Tuesday	√
Wednesday	√	Wednesday ⁵	√	Wednesday	√	Wednesday	√
Thursday ³	√	Thursday	√	Thursday	√	Thursday	√
Friday	√	Friday	√	Friday	√	Friday	√
Saturday	√	Saturday	√	Saturday ⁷	√	Saturday	√
Sunday ⁴	√	Sunday	√	Sunday	√	Sunday	

Well congratulations. There is a very high probability that you have reduced your humming by 80-95% by now which is great.

The problem, as the cliché goes, is the rest of your life. It won't be possible to completely eliminate your humming but it will be normal and often when you find yourself humming you will try and convert it into a song ... you probably do that now which is fine. Sad I know, but it is very easy to return to old habits. Humming for you is an addictive and enjoyable habit so you need to really try and keep it in a box. So ideally you need to keep these steps up for at least another two months by which time the habit will have been broken or severely brought into the conscious side of the brain making you more aware of it and so making it easier to control. So keep up with all the steps, especially the notebook and penalty. Look back at the book occasionally and see what progress you have made and remember to reward yourself.

So what if this hasn't worked or you have relapsed back. Simple. You have already made progress, so you just need to keep up all those steps for longer putting in extra effort. The method works, it just takes some people more time than others. Remember, **on average** it takes eight weeks to break a habit so for some it will take less time than this, for you it may take longer, but don't lose heart because you have made progress if you have faithfully followed the steps. So finally the last step

- **Step 8: You need to keep working at these steps for at least another eight weeks. Review progress each week, and when you have four free weeks of humming you can stop the programme.**

So create a new chart such as that below (Table 2) and record the number of times that you have recorded in that notebook or on your smart phone that you have caught yourself or been caught humming. Once again set yourself a time to review this and place it in a diary. If you wish you can engage the help of your partner to do this this, but this puts added pressure on yourself, so perhaps it is best to do this on your own. At this stage we don't have to worry about a couple of seconds of humming before you stop yourself or turn it into a song, it is humming for more than 10 seconds that needs to be recorded. What you are aiming at is 4 weeks of zero prolonged humming. So good luck and please don't give up.

Table 2. Use a table like this to keep a record of the frequency of your own humming over 7 day periods. It is useful to use actual dates rather than week numbers.

Week	Number of times you hummed	Week	Number of times you hummed	Week	Number of times you hummed
5		9		13	
6		10		14	
7		11		15	
8		12		16	

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