

Enrich and actively shape your life with sound

Strengthen your health and support
change processes with sound exercises
and sound massages

Peter Hess und Dr. phil. Christina Koller

A brief sound ritual of just a few minutes every day is enough to strengthen your body and soul – as well as sustain your physical and mental wellbeing. This strengthening effect makes sound exercises and sound massages an outstanding companion for change processes.

Photo: Foto und Bilderwerk

Sound break – my time!

Sound breaks are about treating yourself to relief from the everyday. The outside world becomes less important, and, thereby, space is created for perception of what is. This may be a feeling of relaxation, which often develops quickly with sounds, but it may also be the perception of rambling thoughts or painful body sites. Observing all this without judging leads to a deeper self-understanding and thereby a more fulfilled life. *"The longer I remain in the experience of daily sound breaks, the easier it becomes for me not to judge my perceptions, but to welcome them as a message from me to me. The more often I allow these experiences, the more sound can lead me to my inner core. I enter into the development that is referred to as sound process. This sound process is initiated only with regular practice of the sound break and leads to a change in my physical, mental and spiritual framework that is difficult to describe: the knowledge of continual presence of peace, calm, and happiness in me. I don't lose contact with myself as easily,"*¹, explains the professor couple from Regensburg, Hella und Luis Erler. They coined the phrase "sound break" for short sound exercises of 2-5 minutes in duration that are applied regularly and systematically in private or professional settings.

In the period from 2009 to 2014 the Erlers researched the general effect of such short interventions on children, school staff, and adults through a total of four studies¹. Their third and fourth studies focused on the sound break as stress prevention for adults and was entitled "A sound for me". The 4-week project phase included 105 individuals of which approximately half had no or only limited experience with singing bowls, and the other half consisted of Peter Hess® sound massage practitioners with extensive experience in sound therapy. With only a few exceptions (3%), all participants reported improved relaxation through the sound break. Comparison of the two groups showed that the intensity of relaxation increased with longer practice. The researchers arrived at the following conclusion:

"The desire to apply sounds to yourself can be the beginning of an exciting journey in sound. With a singing bowl, the path to bringing sound into your life, integrating it into your normal day, and documenting the first "adventures" that result from sound can begin. [...] A sound break can be the start of devotion to yourself, can foster recovery phases that save me from burnout, and can enable the experience of stress and relaxation. This would then be the end of frenzy without break!"

Soothing sounds for body, mind, and soul

As early as 2010, a study on sound massage application showed that sound massage helps to better manage stress and to feel comfortable with your own body². A total of 200 subjects participated in this study; participants received 5 sound massages over a period of 5 weeks. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire prior to the first massage, after the last, and 5 weeks after the study. At the same time, feedback was also collected from sound massage providers. The questionnaires showed that symptoms typical for stress such as headaches, backpain, sleep disorders and general malaise regressed "incidentally". Here are a few comments from study participants:

"I would not have thought that I could let go this easily!"

"I feel like a completely different person – my head is where it's supposed to be, but nothing hurts!"

"I feel very comfortable in my own skin, maybe I can now lose weight."

These positive effects on a physical, mental, and spiritual level are congruent with the sound break studies conducted by Hella und Luis Erler. The following report by Katharina Simon regarding the experiences of her mother who participated in the study "A sound for me!" underscores these positive effects.

The experiences of my mother with a "sound break"

von Katharina Simon

In November 2011, Prof. Dr. Hella Maria Erler informed me of the project "Sound break – a sound for me" in which daily sound exercises – so-called sound breaks – were to be carried out. At the time, sound breaks had only been studied on children, but now they were to be carried out on adults. During the search for participants, I asked my mother (age 77 at the time), if she had any interest in trying a sound break. At first, she did not want to participate, but since she was feeling very poorly at the time, hope and interest grew after a little while and she thought: "Maybe it will help a little." She thus decided to participate in the project and together we drove to Regensburg on a rainy November afternoon for the informational meeting on this project hosted by Hella and Luis Erler.

At the Erler residence, several participants had already arrived, and a broad range of cardiac and joint bowls waited on their future "temporary owners" (bowls were on loan from Helmut Kaiser · www.rhythmuswelt.de). When the time came for participants to select a bowl whose sound they found pleasing and would therefore enjoy working with, my mother was unsure as to what to do and what bowl she should pick. I, by the way, was not either – as this was the first contact with such an instrument for both of us. But after trying a few, my mother was able to make a decision and went into the seminar room with "her" singing bowl. There, the goal and implementation of the "sound break" was explained and demonstrated to us. We were also instructed on how to document our experiences in a journal.

On our return trip, the main topic of conversation was of course our newly acquired knowledge. My mother took her responsibilities very seriously, practiced a sound break three times per day and documented these carefully. Even my father's initial teasing did not dissuade her. Although she did not drive with me to Regensburg for further meetings, she always wanted to know exactly what had transpired; how the other participants were doing, what their experiences were. With regard to my mother specifically, her tinnitus symptoms regressed during the course of the four weeks. Upon completion of the project, she did not want return "her" bowl and purchased it. Since then, she applies the sound break in phases – periods without sound break follow periods with sound breaks, etc. A little while ago, I asked her if she was still practicing "her sound breaks" regularly, and the following conversation ensued:

She: "Not at the moment. I had those shoulder treatments, but my pain is still so severe that I am unable to hold the mallet."

I: "Ok, but you practiced the sound break on and off for years. What were your experiences over the course of that time?"

She: "Well, it has a very calming effect on me. Working with the sound bowl is soothing to me. My heart beats more regularly. It is also good for my knees and shoulder (my mother has suffered from moderate to severe rheumatism for years). I found that if I do it consistently, I have the best results. But sometimes, I neglect to use it again. Nonetheless, up until now, I always go back to it at some point and start the exercises again. When I feel better, I will use it again."

I: "I remember you saying at the beginning that it improved your tinnitus."

She: "Now that you mention it, I can manage my tinnitus well now. I think it also helps my rotational vertigo, although I am still dizzy from time to time. As you know, this has caused me to fall several times. But it also helps my headaches – unless those are caused by high blood pressure – I close all the drapes, lie down, and put the singing bowl on my stomach and let the sound penetrate deep inside me. Beforehand, I also do some breathing exercise. Then I can relax completely."

A few weeks after this conversation, my mother reported:
"By the way, I am using the singing bowl again, even though it is still difficult to hold the mallet. The only bad thing is that the bowl keeps slipping down."

I: "You need to put something underneath it or get a bowl with a hole."

She: "With a hole? – I don't need a bowl with a hole! I discovered that the sound radiates up into my shoulder, even if the bowl is placed a little further away. With the legs and knees, the sound reaches down into the soles of my feet and my feet tingle."

I: "Aha!"

She: "You know what else I found out? The low sounds spread down to the soles of my feet, but the low sounds can't penetrate my shoulder, I need a bright sound for that."

I: "How do get the different sounds?"

She: *"It's easy, I use the other side of the mallet or a smaller mallet."*

I: *"I think it's great that you gained all this experience."*

She: *"It took a long time for me to feel this intensity. Now I can feel it as it goes through my body. I know that when I do it repeatedly, preferably on a regular basis and while I am relaxed, then it really does help me a lot!"*

Sound relaxation for the abdomen

The following sound exercise for the abdomen is very popular as this region of the body is particularly sensitive to stress, e.g. in the form of digestive problems as well as abdominal or stomach pain. The harmonic sounds and soft sound vibrations are soothing and relaxing. They calm the mind and loosen the body. The soft vibrations gently and gradually spread across the skin, organs, tissue, and body fluids of the abdomen. Stress, which often feels like a "brick in the stomach area", can be slowly reduced. Due to its relaxation effect, this exercise is also applicable for menstrual symptoms.

Photo: Anna Avramidou



Exercise:

- Lie down on your back and make yourself as comfortable as possible.
- Place the singing bowl on the so-called "solar plexus". This area is approx. 10 cm (breadth of a hand) above your navel.
- Make sure your head is well supported as well as the arm you will use to tap the singing bowl so that you don't strain yourself unnecessarily.
- Now, gently tap the singing bowl from the outside on the upper edge.
- If you would like, close your eyes and direct your attention entirely onto your solar plexus. Perceive how the sounds massage this area and how soothing relaxation gradually spreads outwards from there.
- Inhale and exhale deeply and repeat this several times.
- After you have tapped the singing bowl several times on your solar plexus, push the bowl a little further down so that it touches your pubic bone.
- Now, gently tap the bowl several times while it is placed in this position. Tap the bowl in long intervals and feel the vibrations propagating through your body.
- Then push the bowl back onto your solar plexus and tap it there again 3 to 5 times.
- Trace your sensations: What are you feeling? How are you feeling?
- In conclusion, stretch extensively before you open your eyes and return your attention to the here and now.

Sound transformation – supporting change processes with sound

Through my more than 35 years of experience, I (Peter Hess) have learned that the sounds of singing bowls not only strengthen health, but also provide an excellent opportunity to actively shape change processes and support them in a sustainable manner. This is consistently demonstrated especially in seminars that have a large component of self-discovery. Many times, in the 8-day sound massage intensive training, I see participants leaving the seminar in a different state than they entered it – they are more confident, clearer, and happier.

Often, this change is the beginning of a closer look at life choices. We begin to ask ourselves if we are living the life we really want to live. Sounds support this process. In the state of deep relaxation that many individuals experience already in their first sound massage, they are comfortable. Feelings of serenity, security, and trust ensue. These, in turn, create an ideal base for us to observe the here and now as though from a higher vantage point, without judgment. And we start feeling. It is as though the quietness to which the sounds lead us shows us the path to our inner space. A space of peace that affords us strength and clarity. In this space, we make contact with our innermost desires, longings, and needs. And in this space, new opportunities are revealed to us, because here, we also have access to our resources, our inner wisdom. Like no other medium, sounds

help us to perceive this richness (again), as reflected in the following feedback after completion of a week-long intensive sound massage training seminar:

"In this seminar, I felt that I, like a flower, had many buds that were closed. Every day, more of these would open and I began to shine from the bottom of my heart. Now I am in full bloom as in the spring, and through the support of the group and Peter and Emily (seminar instructors), I could grow in fertile ground." (Tobias Witzenberger)

"I know of no better method for achieving relaxation and balance than sound massage and sound meditation. During the course of the week, I felt as though I had been disintegrated down to the deepest cellular level and newly reassembled in harmony and inner balance. The sensation of attentiveness, a directedness of internal perception and external perception come together as a whole during a sound massage." (Doreen Friedrichs)

The description by Doreen Friedrichs explains what I experience so often. The sounds lead us to perception, enable acceptance and ultimately letting go, so that restructuring can occur. Many participants regard the sounds as a structuring stimulus, a type of harmonization that is created naturally.

Photo: Andreas Kreutzfeldt



In this context, I like to talk about the process of "sound transformation", as, for me, this term highlights the transformative potentials the sounds present to us. Through the internalization of the experience we just described, we begin to shape our life more actively and in a more self-directed manner and to fill it with more and more joy – we feel balanced and are fulfilled! Many individuals also feel embedded in a great whole that carries them. From this nurturing space, we are in a position to see clearly what is good for us and what is not. This enables us to formulate concrete ideas, visions, or objectives for our life and to orient ourselves towards these. Of course, change does not happen overnight. It is a path that you can only take one step at a time. And on this path, you will encounter beautiful and joyful experiences as well as hurdles and stumbling blocks. But with support of the sounds, we can walk the path steadily, with ease and full of happiness. The sounds continually remind us of the experience of relaxation and restructuring. The experience that we are buoyed, that change is possible anytime, that we can be an active architect of our life and that every experience along this path is valuable – regardless of whether we perceive it as pleasant or unpleasant. Because, ultimately, it is only through experiences that we can grow and realize our potential. How valuable active confrontation with inner images and convictions is in this process is repeatedly evidenced in my

seminars "Effective Affirmation – storyline(s), composition, and implementation" und "Actively shaping my life – 5 minutes of sound a day that change my life". Only when we recognize the limiting doctrines we have acquired over the course of our life, can we let them go and replace them with helpful and strong affirmations. These then support us on our path to change. Just 5 minutes a day are sufficient, this corresponds to 0.37% of our daytime life. But these 5 minutes of sound a day can help us achieve a new quality of life by giving us the following experiences:

- You enjoy the sound
- You are completely with(in) yourself with the sound
- You feel safe
- The sound gives you space to unfold and provides serenity
- You can observe your life as though from a higher vantage point
- You recognize your needs, desires, longings
- You develop an inner vision, a goal
- You confidently embark on the path to change
- The sounds accompany you daily, remind you of your visions, and strengthen you in their continual implementation.

It is the path that changes us.



Photo: Andreas Kreutzfeldt

The nature of sound transformations as I experienced them in my own life and witnessed them in numerous participants is characterized by ease and happiness – this distinguishes sound-supported change.

Logging your daily sound exercises and experiences in a journal is very helpful. This is supported by studies conducted by Hella and Luis Erler.

This daily reflection helps us to consciously perceive and honor even small steps. Especially in times when things are not going so well does this help find the trust and confidence needed to carry on. Networking with likeminded individuals is also especially helpful, as described in Vera Felsing's article (Professional Magazine Sound Massage Therapy 14/2019, p. 84-91). And so, we attain our goal – alone or together – step by step. And that can be proudly and properly celebrated!

Literature (on german)

1) Dr. Hella M. Erler und Dr. Luis Erler: Ein Klang für mich! Untersuchung zur Wirkung der Klang-Pause bei einzelnen und Gruppen. In: Fachzeitschrift Klang-Massage-Therapie 9/2014, S. 48-52.

2) Dr. Christina M. Koller und Dr. Tanja Grotz: Mit der Peter Hess-Klangmassage Stress abbauen und die Gesundheit stärken. In: Fachzeitschrift Klang-Massage-Therapie 7/2010, S. 15-19 (Neuaufgabe 2014).



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Reading and listening tips:

- In the free brochure "Sound: Source of Inner Strength – The sound bowl as valuable life companion" you can find many valuable sound exercises, practice tips, and other information on the subject of sound and singing bowls. You can download it from the website of the European Professional Association for Sound Massage Therapy e.V. at www.fachverband-klang.de (<https://www.fachverband-klang.de/english-content.html>)
- In the english book "Singing Bowls – My practical companion" you can find numerous ideas for experimenting with singing bowls and the most popular sound exercises.
- If you do not own a singing bowl, the CD "Adhvanika – a journey into the world of sounds" provides wonderful sound impressions with singing bowls. The CD "The healing power of sound massage" provides guided and relaxing sound mediations.
- Guided sound exercises and sound journeys can also be found on the "Peter Hess® Institute" channel at www.sound-cloud.com or on the blog www.dieweltdesklangs.de (on german)