

Working with Contraindications & Adaptations

Sound therapy is generally considered a **very low-risk wellbeing practice** and is widely used to support relaxation, nervous system regulation, and overall wellbeing. Most people can participate safely and comfortably.

The health considerations listed in these notes are **not intended to prevent participation**, but to help practitioners make thoughtful adaptations when needed. Every individual responds differently to sound, and sessions should always be approached with sensitivity and awareness.

Participants should always be encouraged to **listen to their own bodies and communicate any discomfort or concerns** during a session. They are free to adjust their position, take breaks, or step away at any time.

As a practitioner, it is important to work **gently, responsively, and within your scope of practice**. When relevant health conditions are present, the session may simply require modifications in volume, pacing, rhythm, or positioning.

Ultimately, **practitioner discretion and good judgement are essential**. If you are unsure whether a session is appropriate for someone, it is always acceptable to suggest a gentler approach, adapt the session, or recommend that the participant consult a healthcare professional.

The key principle is:

When in doubt, reduce intensity and increase choice.

Communication & Ongoing Awareness

Participants are responsible for informing the practitioner of any relevant health conditions or sensitivities before the session begins. When a participant has shared this information, the practitioner can then make appropriate adaptations to support their comfort and safety.

During the session, participants should be encouraged to listen to their own bodies and communicate if anything feels uncomfortable, overwhelming, or unsettling. They are always free to adjust their position, take a break, or step away if needed.

When meeting a participant for the first time, it is good practice for the facilitator to briefly reiterate this invitation for communication, reminding them that they can speak up at any point during the session. This helps establish a clear, collaborative approach where both practitioner and participant share responsibility for maintaining a safe and supportive environment.

Neurological Conditions

(Epilepsy, seizure disorders, brain injury, severe migraines)

Rhythm and repetitive sound can influence neural activity and brainwave patterns. For individuals with neurological sensitivities, strong stimulation may be overwhelming.

Suggested Adaptations

- Avoid **strong repetitive drumming** or intense rhythmic entrainment.
- Use **slower pacing and softer dynamics**.
- Focus on **gentle harmonic instruments** such as singing bowls.
- Avoid **sudden loud sounds or sharp strikes**.
- Keep sessions **shorter initially** and observe how the client responds.
- Encourage participants to sit rather than lie down if that feels safer.

If someone has epilepsy or a history of seizures, it is always appropriate to suggest they consult their healthcare professional before attending sessions.

Cardiovascular Conditions

(High blood pressure, heart conditions, pacemakers)

Low-frequency sound can be strongly felt in the body, particularly around the chest and abdomen.

Suggested Adaptations

- Avoid placing instruments **directly on the body**, particularly near the chest.
- Keep **volume moderate and steady** rather than intense.
- Use **spacious pacing** rather than dense sound.
- Encourage participants to remain **comfortable and well supported**.

If someone has a pacemaker or other implanted medical device, avoid strong vibration close to the device.

Mental Health Considerations

(Psychosis, severe dissociation, mania, acute trauma)

Sound can shift states of consciousness and emotional processing. While this can be therapeutic, it may not be appropriate for individuals who are currently unstable.

Suggested Adaptations

- Prioritise **grounding rather than deep altered states**.
- Use **gentle rhythm or steady tones** rather than immersive sound journeys.
- Keep the participant **more upright or seated**, which can feel more stabilising.
- Encourage **eyes open if needed**.
- Avoid encouraging catharsis or emotional pushing.

If someone appears significantly unstable, it may be more appropriate to suggest alternative support.

Pregnancy

Sound sessions are generally safe during pregnancy, but sensitivity may be heightened.

Suggested Adaptations

- Avoid **strong low-frequency vibration directly on the body**.
 - Use **softer sound levels and spacious pacing**.
 - Ensure the participant is **comfortable and well supported**.
 - Allow freedom to adjust position at any time.
-

Hearing Sensitivities

(Tinnitus, hyperacusis, sound sensitivity)

For some people, loud or sudden sound can be uncomfortable or triggering.

Suggested Adaptations

- Maintain **gentle volume levels**.
- Avoid **sudden loud strikes**, particularly with gongs or metal instruments.
- Position louder instruments **further away**.
- Encourage participants to **adjust their position or move further from instruments** if needed.

Participants should always feel free to **leave the room or take a break** if the sound becomes uncomfortable.

Neurodivergence (Including ADHD)

Participants with ADHD or other forms of neurodivergence may experience sound sessions differently. Attention, sensory processing, and nervous system regulation can vary from person to person.

Sound can be very supportive for ADHD, particularly when rhythm and sensory input help organise attention. However, long periods of stillness or highly subtle sound environments may sometimes feel challenging.

Suggested Adaptations

- Allow **freedom to move or adjust position** if needed.
- Offer **clear guidance about what to expect** during the session.
- Use **rhythm and steady pacing**, which can support nervous system regulation.
- Avoid very long periods of complete silence without orientation.
- Encourage participants to **sit upright rather than lying down** if that feels easier for them.
- Normalise that people may experience the session in different ways.

Some individuals with ADHD may find **rhythmic instruments such as drums particularly regulating**, while others may prefer steady tones or voice.

The key is to maintain a **flexible and non-judgemental space** where participants can regulate themselves.

Practitioner Responsibility

As a facilitator, your role is to:

- Work **within your scope of practice**
- Offer **adaptation rather than force**
- Prioritise **safety and nervous system regulation**
- Encourage participants to **listen to their bodies**

You are not responsible for creating dramatic experiences.

You are responsible for creating a **safe and supportive environment**.