Binaural Beats

Sound that helps the busy mind soften

Some evenings the mind keeps spinning long after the day is done. Binaural beats are one gentle way to give it something else to hold. All you need is a pair of stereo headphones and a comfortable place to rest, along with a little curiosity about what happens inside you as you listen.

What Binaural Beats Are

Binaural beats are made from two steady tones, one in each ear, set at slightly different pitches. If your left ear hears a tone at 200 hertz and your right ear hears one at 210 hertz, your brain blends the two and perceives a soft pulse at the difference between them: 10 beats per second. That pulse lives only inside you. Through a speaker, the two tones mix in the air before they reach your ears and the effect changes, which is why headphones matter.

Why People Use Them

The idea behind binaural beats is that the brain may begin to fall in step with the pulse it hears, drifting toward the rhythm of a calmer or more focused state. Tracks are usually labeled by the brainwave range they aim for:

- **Delta (about 1 to 4 beats per second):** deep sleep and rest
- **Theta (about 4 to 8):** deep relaxation and meditation, the dreamy edge of sleep
- **Alpha (about 8 to 13):** calm, relaxed alertness
- **Beta (about 13 to 30):** focus and active thinking
- **Gamma (above 30):** concentrated attention

How I Think of Them

I think of binaural beats as a gentle decoy for the overthinking mind. While part of my attention follows the pulse of the sound, the part of me that loves to worry and plan has less room to run the show, and my body gets a chance to soften. Some people feel a great deal; some feel very little. Listen for a few sessions and see what shifts for you: your breath, the set of your shoulders, the speed of your thoughts, how easily sleep comes.

What the Research Says

The research is promising and young. Reviews of the studies so far show a moderate easing of anxiety and some help with focus. The popular idea that the beats balance the left and right sides of the brain has little evidence behind it. Think of binaural beats as one lovely tool among several, alongside breath, movement and time in nature.

A Close Cousin: Bilateral Music

Some music moves sound back and forth from one ear to the other in a slow rhythm. This is called bilateral music, and it is related to the side-to-side rhythm used in EMDR. Many people find that following the sound as it travels from ear to ear gives the busy mind a steady place to rest. If that back-and-forth is what calms you, search for "bilateral music" as well as binaural beats.

How to Listen

- Use headphones or earbuds. Binaural beats need a separate tone in each ear.
- Keep the volume low and comfortable, just loud enough to hear.
- Find a place where you can sit or lie down without needing to respond to anything.
- Start with 15 to 30 minutes. Longer sessions often deepen the effect.
- Choose theta or delta for rest and sleep, and alpha for gentle calm during the day.
- Let your thoughts come and go. When you drift into planning, bring your attention back to the sound.
- Afterward, take a moment to feel how you are, and keep what helps.

Please Take Care

- Never listen while driving or doing anything that needs your full attention.
- If you have epilepsy or a seizure disorder, talk with your doctor before trying binaural beats.
- If a track leaves you dizzy or unsettled, stop and try a different one, or try again another day.
- Binaural beats support relaxation. They do not replace medical or mental health care.

Where to Find Them (All Free)

- **myNoise Binaural Beat Generator** (free in your web browser; a few extras are for donors): mynoise.net/NoiseMachines/binauralBrainwaveGenerator.php
- **Insight Timer** (free app and website): insighttimer.com, then search “binaural beats”
- **YouTube** (free): search “theta binaural beats” or “delta binaural beats sleep”
- **Spotify** (free with ads, in the app or the web player at open.spotify.com): search “binaural beats”
- **Bilateral music** (free online player): crowncounseling.com/assessments/bilateral-music

Credit

Binaural beats were first described by Heinrich Wilhelm Dove (1839) and studied by Gerald Oster (1973). Research: Garcia-Argibay et al. (2019); Ingendoh et al. (2023). Descriptions are my own.