

Bad Hearing Days

Adapted from Gael Hannan

The following article was written by an adult who is Hard of Hearing. Although the intended audience is adults who are Hard of Hearing, it provides a good perspective on having a bad hearing day.

Ever had one of *those* days? A day that is filled, from sunrise to moonrise, with hearing *faux pas* and embarrassing moments? A day when, no matter what the situation or conversation, communication brings more pain than pleasure? A day that tempts you to hide from all human interaction - *forever*?

You know you're having a bad hearing day when:

- You're missing so much that you pull out your hearing aid and look at it, bewildered and betrayed, in much the same way a tennis player might, after a bad shot, examine a racquet with disbelief. (Is there a *hole* in it? Is there something wrong with the *equipment*?)
- You say pardon so often that - well, you just say it *so often!*
- People's lips seem to be moving to words that have no resemblance to what you are hearing - rather like watching a Japanese movie dubbed in Danish (and you speak only, say, Romanian).
- You have an unexpected flare-up of tinnitus - the one that sounds like an endless parade of bongos and castanets.
- You turn clammy, realizing you don't have any backup batteries in your purse. So you tense up, subconsciously trying to *hear less*, in an attempt to minimize battery power.
- You try bluffing your way through a meeting, or a book club conversation. All of a sudden, the hot laser eyes of the universe are turned on you, expectantly, and you have *zero* idea what you're supposed to respond to.

- *Everyone* you know seems to have forgotten *everything* you've taught them about good communication. Even your *mom*, and that hurts.

And the day just goes on and on in the hearing loss version of Murphy's Law. What *can* go wrong, *will* go wrong and at the end of the day, you feel exhausted, abused and mildly frantic. "*I hate this hearing loss,*" you curse, fist to the ceiling. "*Why me? Why not my sister, or my cousin? Why couldn't I have been dealt a different disability?*"

While there's no good answer to these questions (especially from the well-meaning person who suggests that your hearing loss isn't as bad as their chronically itchy feet), that dramatic fist flourish *does* feel good because sometimes a body just needs to VENT!

But once the hissy-fit has run out of hiss, how *do* you get over an epic bad hearing day? A cup of mint tea? Binge-watching on Netflix? A brisk two-mile walk?

Well, yes! Those *will* help and may give you time to think back over the day. Was it a long string of bad moments, or just one or two paralyzing moments of communication-gone-wrong? And why all in one day?

It could be due to one, or both, of the evil twins: *fatigue* and *anxiety*. If you are tired, or if you've been anxious about something else, it's difficult to focus on what's being said, leaving you vulnerable to communication breakdowns. And when one communication glitch occurs, it's not always easy to sail through the frustration and relegate it to the mental garbage bin. The negative emotion may linger, so that when a second glitch occurs, it becomes amplified out of proportion, and the day becomes an increasingly large snowball of frustration.

A third possibility is that *some days are just like that*. A bad hearing day is like a bad hair day, or a day on which you got up on the wrong side of the bed. So while these aren't foolproof ways to prevent a bad hearing day, they might certainly help:

- Be technically prepared: Make sure hearing technology is as pristine as possible, and have backup batteries within grabbing distance.
- Be well-rested. Generally speaking, people with hearing loss use more energy to communicate than do hearing people; our intense *visual* focus can be draining. If we're tired (regardless of the reason), we simply don't have the mental resources required for the communication gauntlet.
- Try to separate anxiety about other issues from bad hearing moments. Anxiety can weaken our ability to speechread and/or be attentive to sound cues. If a communication glitch occurs, recognize the problem, deal with it and move on. Or, give yourself a break and remove yourself from the communication environment; try a quick trip to the washroom for some deep breathing and a few moments of peace and quiet.
- Have a couple of tried-and-true throwaway lines on hand, i.e., *"I'm having a bad hearing day"* or *"Well, that wasn't even close, was it?"* or *"Why stop at two? Can you repeat that for a third time, please?"* Preferably, these would be delivered with a little smile or laugh. (They say that when you have hearing loss, you need to keep your sense of humour. My question is - what if you never had one in the first place?)

Finally - and this may not be of any comfort whatsoever - know that when you're having a bad hearing day, there are millions of other people *out there* having an equally bad day, some for the same reason and others for reasons we cannot possibly imagine. The good news is that tomorrow the sun is going to rise again - most likely on a *much better* communication day.