

On noises and people

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Misophonia is a disorder of decreased tolerance to specific sounds or their associated stimuli. Unfortunately, I am one of the seemingly few people who suffer from it. And, trust me, I do not exaggerate when I say it feels like a psychological torture method. Unlike other invisible ailments, you cannot medicate or meditate it away. You just have to sit there, trying to be normal as if your sanity was not being slowly chipped away with every pen click, sniff, or chewing mouth you are trapped with. Having to deal with misophonia is like being shoved onto a knife throwing wheel every single day of your life, the knives being the noise that will always catch you off guard, and the knife thrower being the cruel universe which seems to be constantly conspiring against you. The worst part is that, no matter how much you try, you will never break free from these triggering sounds, unless you decide to become a monk and live in the mountains away from society for the rest of your life. Personally, I do not want to become a monk, as peaceful as my brain would finally be. I actually enjoy being with people, with most people at least. Sadly, coexisting with others also means having to coexist with the dreadful symphony of noises they are capable of emitting. Some people can make this coexistence easier, others, on the contrary, make it completely impossible, and some others do nothing about it.

I will start off by referring to people who are actually normal, decent people, but make me furious the second they emit any sound which triggers my misophonia. Most commonly, the pen clickers. They are everywhere and you will never be able to escape them no matter what, especially when you are trapped in a room where pens proliferate, such as a classroom. In that context, all you can do is leave for a few minutes and pray that the haunting *click, click, click, click* has stopped the moment you come back. There are also the ones who do not even realize they are producing disturbing sounds, because they are asleep. People who snore, especially those whose snoring is as loud as a semi-truck horn, can be a nightmare. You either have to get up, shake them, and tell them they are snoring (which they will utterly resent), suffer in silence while the snores penetrate your skull, or put some loud music on, using earphones, of course. The last choice seems to be, and usually is, the best option, though it is pretty difficult to sleep while your eardrums are being blasted by music and, if you are a side sleeper, one of your earbuds is stabbing your ear. There is another kind, which is most frequent during the winter: the sniffers, those who have a cold and have either forgotten or did not think they would need to bring tissues, making the entire room aware of that by sniffing all day long. I must confess that I have been guilty of this, forgetting to bring tissues and only remembering when I had already left home, having to endure not being able to blow my nose for hours and also having to put others through the pain of hearing me sniff every other minute.

There are also the best, and nicest people alive, those who understand your plight and avoid making noises out of pure empathy. They may start making some noises unheedingly, such as the pen clicking, but once they become aware of it, they stop in order not to trigger your misophonia. Obviously, not that their thoughtfulness would cure misophonia or delete triggering noises altogether, but the intention is what matters the most. In their case, I do not get angry and try my best to ignore any noises they might make, since I know they are doing their best to be quiet. It is rare to find people like these because most fail to understand what you are talking about and do not pay attention or act annoyed as though it were a huge inconvenience.

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The latter leads me to those who, in my opinion, are the worst. Those who take peace and silence as an insult. It is as if they had been summoned from hell specifically to torment you and drive you insane. You tell them certain noises bother you, expecting them to mind their noise level a bit. What do they do in response? They double down on it, make noises on purpose to mock you and weaponize your misophonia because they do not believe it is real. I have no idea why anyone would do this, but such is the mystery of the human mind. Luckily, this type of people is also rare, though less rare than the previous type. However, one never knows, which is why I do not spread the word about my misophonia.

I am aware that I am a minority here. Few people know what misophonia is. Not to mention those people who claim to know how you feel and accuse you of overreacting, telling you to just “deal with it” when you beg for something as perfectly reasonable as “please, chew with your mouth closed”. I will never forget how, after years of having to hear my dad chewing so loudly that he could rival the blue whale for the top spot of the loudest animal, I finally asked my grandma not to seat us next to each other because the noise he emitted was unbearable. I expected her to understand what I meant, as she was usually very nice, but instead she retorted: “I don’t understand what’s bothering you! Don’t be mean to your dad”, in a tone that sounded like a mixture of scolding and genuine confusion. I tried to explain myself, to no avail, so I have ended up settling the matter by using my Bluetooth earbuds whenever I am invited for a meal at her house, playing music loud enough not to be driven mad by the cacophony of chewing mouths, but low enough to hear when someone is talking to me. Even then, there are, thankfully, good souls out there who consider the way you feel and try to make the least possible noise. I personally believe the latter’s attitude is a sign that not all hope is lost in this life. But, in a truly utopic world, those people would not exist since misophonia should not exist in the first place.