

Finding Freedom from Misophonia – Sara’s Story (Triggers Named)

I battled misophonia for 25 years, starting when I was twelve. It wasn't until my mid-20s that I had a name for my struggle, and I've been free from it for over five years now.

I was triggered by eating and other mouth sounds, oral sounds from animals, repetitive movements, and certain syllables. Those I spent a lot of time with triggered me most easily, though I could also be triggered by any person chewing gum and classmates snacking when I needed to focus on a test or lecture. Misophonia was most heightened with my partner of 19 years, followed by my parents and college roommates.

Before finding relief, I had anticipatory anxiety prior to entering situations where triggering might occur. Once in those settings, triggers were at the forefront of my mind. When triggering occurred, I would have a strong urge to get away from the trigger or to stop it. This was accompanied by intense anger or disgust, muscle tension, and uncomfortable body sensations, most typically the sensation of wanting to crawl out of my own skin. In essence, triggers would hijack both my mind and body.

Nowadays, I can be around those same triggers and trigger people without experiencing anything I just described. Ninety-five percent of the time, I don't even notice my former triggers when they're present. The only scenario where my brain can become focused on and my body somewhat activated by past triggers is when I find myself in a confined space (like a car), feeling stressed about something else (such as running late), and there's no end in sight with the trigger (like with gum chewing). However, I approach it with agency and self-compassion, understanding my experience in the context of heightened mirroring (a genetic strength and challenge) and my lower brain trying to protect me.

The journey to this point wasn't straightforward. Over the years, I sought help from various therapists and professionals. While most had never heard of misophonia, they did equip me with tools to manage and improve other aspects of my life—such as setting boundaries, practicing self-compassion, and learning relaxation techniques. Mindfulness meditation became a cornerstone of my daily routine, after taking Jon Kabat-Zinn’s 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Course in my early 30’s.

I explored different avenues—anti-anxiety medications, inner-ear white noise generators, even a rigorous vitamin regimen—but none cracked the code of misophonia. In 2017, I began Somatic Experiencing training. This three-year program helped me reconnect with my body, heal past traumas, and reclaim agency over my nervous system.

Leaving an unhealthy marriage was the final step toward liberating myself from misophonia.

Because it was such a night-and-day experience, at first, it seemed to be “the reason” misophonia was no longer an issue for me. But over time, I came to see that the work I had done before that transition had laid the groundwork for this outcome and leaving the relationship was the final box I needed to check for my nervous system to come back in balance.

Since then, I've maintained lifestyle habits—especially regular exercise, mindfulness practices, and prioritizing sleep—and continued therapy to ensure my nervous system remains balanced. Understanding myself as a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) has reframed my experiences positively, fostering self-acceptance instead of shame.

For me, my intense struggle with misophonia seemed to be largely a manifestation of repressed emotions and unhealthy boundaries and, subsequently, an imbalanced nervous system. It was a catch-22; viewing myself as broken due to misophonia, I expected less in my relationships and didn't feel I could justify setting certain boundaries, which then led to further nervous system dysregulation and heightened misophonia. Addressing these underlying issues meant my genetic tendencies no longer showed up in an extreme and debilitating form: misophonia.

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Learn more about Sara Bidler and her practice at authenticlivingts.com.

You can also listen to her interview on "The Misophonia Podcast" with Adeel Ahmad at misophoniapodcast.com/episodes/s6e10-sara-lmft-sep.

Sara has a book coming out at the end of 2024/beginning of 2025 in which she will share her insights and strategies for finding freedom from misophonia in greater depth.