

Case Study

Bilateral Ménière's – Nathalie Camp

"You're fine" they said. "You don't need to see a specialist." But how wrong they were? My story began during my last year of my undergraduate degree at University when my health started to deteriorate. I was getting constant ear infections and felt as though my hearing was getting worse. I became a regular at the doctors who told me it was "just an infection" and was given antibiotics. I started to struggle to hear people, to hear noises that other people heard and it really started to affect my life. I would have to ask others to repeat on a regular basis and I knew something was not quite right. I saw the doctor who told me that he believed that nothing was wrong and that I didn't need to be referred to see a specialist. I wasn't convinced and so I decided to get a private hearing test at Specsavers. I felt very anxious, not having had a hearing test before and not knowing what to expect. I remember the audiologist very well. She sat me down after the test and said "I don't quite know how to tell you this...you are severely deaf in both ears". She admitted to me that she was appalled that the doctors could have neglected my concerns and that I suffered from bilateral hearing loss which resulted in 50% hearing loss in both ears. She gave me a letter to give to my GP which I did almost immediately and I patiently awaited a referral to see a ENT specialist. Despite it being an urgent referral I had to wait a few months for the appointment and a further few months to get my hearing aids. They admitted that I did suffer with bilateral hearing loss but did not know nor did they want to try to figure out the cause of it. Discovering I was deaf not only took a toll on my life but also on my studies. I had to sit exams in a different format to other students, especially as I was studying languages which involved a lot of speaking and listening exams. I struggled to adapt to my hearing aids which felt overwhelming in itself, let alone the fact I had to accept that I was now "disabled".



With time, the hearing aids really helped and I felt that I wouldn't be able to cope without them. I became much more accepting of the situation and felt much better in myself. Unfortunately this wasn't the end of it...

A few years later I had started to feel unwell again. The ear infections became regular and I was back at the doctors on a weekly basis. As always they did not "know the cause", they just gave me antibiotics and sent me on my way, until the day my symptoms deteriorated significantly. Not only did I have ear pain but I was also experiencing serious vertigo, light headedness and slight ringing in my ears.

I went to the doctor who tried to fob me off again with antibiotics but that time I was having none of it. He finally asked me to stand up so he could check my balance and I lost my balance and fell onto the doctor's desk. At that point he started to take things seriously. He signed me off work for a few weeks and diagnosed me with labyrinthitis and sent a letter for me to be referred to ENT once



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again. I felt a sense of relief to get a diagnosis but my symptoms just got worse and worse. At the time I was working three days a week and studying a postgraduate certificate in mental health practice two days a week. My symptoms caused me to miss a lot of time at university and on placement which led me to have to temporarily withdraw. I was doing a lot of research online and saw that the symptoms of Ménière's disease were very similar to my symptoms but I didn't want to speculate.

After months of waiting I finally saw a specialist who told me to try a low salt diet and tried to give me more antibiotics as well as Serc (betahistine) which is commonly prescribed for people with Ménière's. A few weeks later I was seen by another specialist who finally diagnosed me with bilateral Ménière's disease. I felt a sense of both relief and sadness. I was relieved to finally have a diagnosis but then it occurred to me that my life would be so different from that moment on. I had to come to terms with the fact that I would often have attacks and feel unwell which would change my life quite significantly.

This diagnosis has really affected my life and has had both positive and negative repercussions on my life. It occurred to me that my lifestyle had to change which led me to a change in career, moving to a job which had a much better structure and less hours which has helped me significantly. I have a better diet (which is predominantly low salt) and I am more inclined to listen to my body and look after myself. The negative repercussions? I can never make plans, I struggle with severe attacks and migraines and feel exhausted all the time. Some days I struggle to get out of bed due to the severity of the symptoms and I feel as though I am missing out on my own life. It has also affected my mental health, causing me to be referred back to therapy.

It has now been seven months since I have been diagnosed and although some days are hard, I am so grateful for the support of my family and friends. Through Instagram I have met fellow Ménière's disease warriors who are a great support and make me feel as though I am not alone in this battle which just means the world. If I have learnt anything this past year it's that I need to embrace the good days and not let the bad days define me.

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 for dizziness and balance disorders



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