

Putting Self-care First: So much to do, so little time!



by **Martha Perusse**

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Anyone who has ever flown in a commercial airplane has seen the flight attendant give the safety instructions: in the event of a loss in cabin pressure, you are informed, place the face mask on yourself before helping others. This makes perfect sense in such a context, but in our own daily living, it may seem odd. For some people, it is really challenging to think of oneself first.

As a coach, I see people who are burned out, exhausted and overwhelmed - and one of the major contributing factors is often a lack of self-care.

Self-care involves making the effort to consider various aspects of life (such as the physical, emotional, financial and professional components) and questioning ourselves. Am I living the life I want?

Do I feel there is a purpose to what I am doing? Are there things I could be doing better? Are my days balanced with rich moments of calm, some stimulating, creative or exciting tasks, time for others and time for myself? These are just a few of the ways one can evaluate general quality of life.

If you have a hearing loss, there is an added layer of self-care needed. Being hard of hearing can add stresses and frustrations, and there is a whole gamut of new skills and tasks that require our attention. We have to learn more about hearing loss in general and our own hearing in particular. Being knowledgeable medically is important in all aspects of our health and we may need to devote some time to reading

and consulting with professionals. Learning about hearing aids and assistive listening devices also takes time and effort, but it can make all the difference in making the very best of the hearing we have.

Developing the skills to advocate for our own needs can also be really challenging. It's a whole new skillset that takes persistence and patience-- and a sense of humour. It can be a time for grieving the hearing we had and facing the reality of relationships that can be more - or less - supportive than we may have expected. The courage to seek out supportive groups like CHIP (in Montreal), the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, or Canadian Hearing Society can pay off in finding resources and a new community of supporters who have walked the same walk as you.

In order to guide the process of becoming an expert in your hearing loss, I have created a checklist of over 50 goals to strive for.



The items on this checklist are meant to be guidelines to strive for -- a sort of pathway to feeling in control of your hearing. You may find it necessary to have the assistance of a hearing health professional, an audiologist, an ALD technician, or a CHIP volunteer, peer mentor or instructor. A supportive family member or friend can also be a godsend. You may even want to try working with a coach!

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So grab a pencil and a cup of your favorite relaxing beverage and see how you stand in evaluating your hearing-related competencies. You may find you have accomplished many of these items already -- good for you! Or you may feel overwhelmed and unsure where to start. Don't worry! In many cases, the goals will be long-term and require you to continue to learn and grow. And that's always a good thing.

A Checklist for Individuals with Hearing Loss

Over 50 competencies related to hearing
and becoming the best you can be.



Dealing with my hearing loss medically

- I understand the facts of my hearing loss (can "read" my audiogram)
- I can describe my hearing loss in specific terms (type, degree)
- I can discuss possible changes to my hearing with my hearing health professionals
- I see my ENT doctor on a yearly or biannual basis, as requested
- I have regular audiology appointments or mapping appointments for my cochlear implant, as needed

Dealing with amplification and technology

- I understand how my hearing devices (hearing aids or implants) work
- I understand the advantages and limitations of hearing aids
- I see my hearing aid acoustician as often as needed
- I know about the Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) that can help me
- I know how my ALDs work
- I see my hearing technology (ALD) professional as needed
- I check in with my acoustician and/or audiologist for any new technology on the market
- I know how to activate the captions on my television and use them when necessary
- I make use of technology such as smartphones (e.g. texting, Skype, Bluetooth technology) or computers (email, Skype or other real time video communication)

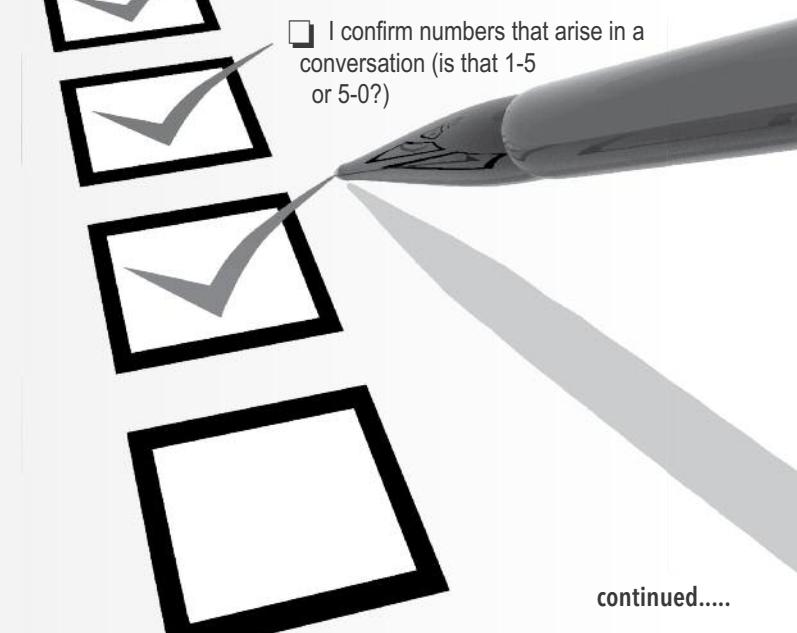
Developing a knowledge base

- I stay informed about issues related to hearing loss (blogs, websites, magazines)
- I belong to an organization(s) that supports individuals with hearing loss (CHIP, CHHA, CHS, HLAA, etc.)
- I know about strategies for dealing with challenging listening situations (lighting, distance, noise, etc.)
- I know about devices that can help in challenging listening situations (such as FM systems, Bluetooth technology, hearing loops, infrared, adapted telephones)

- I know which devices I am eligible for under Medicare
- I know about cochlear implants, even if I don't have one
- I know which professionals I can ask when I have questions or concerns
- I know if I am eligible to receive financial credits or compensation because of my hearing loss

Becoming my own advocate

- I eliminate background noise as much as possible in my home to help me use the hearing I have
- I am open to talking about my hearing loss and listening needs with my family and others
- I let unfamiliar people know I have a hearing loss when we start a conversation
- I ask people to repeat and rephrase when I don't understand
 - I let people know what I need to make understanding better
 - I practice strategies that work for me such as asking for written notes, asking for clarification
 - I confirm numbers that arise in a conversation (is that 1-5 or 5-0?)



continued.....

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- I ask people to move to a better location with me if I need to for less noise, better lighting
- I choose restaurants/venues with better listening environments, if I can
- I arrive early at a meeting to get the best seating for me
- I prepare for stressful listening situations ahead of time as much as possible to minimize feeling isolated or overwhelmed (confirm the topic, ask a friend to clue me in, carry pencil/paper, talk 1 on 1 as much as possible, minimize bluffing)
- I choose group activities that are compatible with my level of hearing
- I know about interpreters (oral and sign language)
- I know about captions and use them at public events, such as movie theatres, and conferences, as needed
- I request and make use of ALDs at public events, such as lectures and conferences.

Safety

- I wear a medic alert ID or carry the “blue card” from the Canadian Hearing Society, indicating my hearing loss
- I have a “broken ear” sticker on my Medicare card
- I have informed my physician, dentist, optometrist and others about my hearing loss and how best to communicate with me
- I have informed the fire department that I have a significant hearing loss
- I have the alerts that are helpful for me (flashing lights for door, phone, alarms)

Self-care

- I know that having a hearing loss is physically exhausting and take care of myself
- I try to get as much sleep as I can
- I have developed techniques to help me relax when I feel overwhelmed (meditation, deep breathing, etc.)
- If I am feeling the need for counselling, I seek out professionals until I find one who is a good match for me.
- I have found ways to maintain my fitness and mobility despite my hearing loss
- I have friends with whom I can spend time when I need companionship
- I have hobbies and creative outlets that are satisfying to me

Making improvements

- I have taken or am taking classes to help me communicate better such as speechreading, signed English, American Sign Language (ASL)
- I participate/have participated in aural rehabilitation to learn to use my hearing aids or cochlear implant, as appropriate
- I practice my skills (e.g. watching TV without sound or repeating phrases in a mirror, practice listening with others or using a computer program/app, as appropriate for my hearing loss)
- I practice strategies to help me understand on the phone, in poor lighting or in noisy situations

Supporting others

- I am open to talking about my hearing loss when others question me
- I educate others about hearing loss in general
- I encourage those who are concerned about their hearing to seek help
- I share my experiences in groups
- I volunteer for an organization that supports those with hearing loss
- I informally support others with hearing loss



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