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By Lara Salahi (http://abcnews.go.com/author/lara_salahi) @LaraSalahiABC (http://twitter.com/LaraSalahiABC) Nov 3, 2011 11:50am

Nails on a Chalkboard: Music to Our Ears?

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Nothing seems more annoying that the sound of fingernails running down a chalkboard. Well, maybe the sound of a fork scraping a ceramic plate.

New research (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/02/nails-on-a-chalkboard-study_n_1072390.html) from the Macromedia University for Media and Communication in Germany and the University of Vienna suggests that the reasons most of us are painfully peeved by these high-pitch squeals is both physical and psychological.

Research participants were exposed to the sound of nails on a chalkboard and similar sounds, such as a fork scraping a plate. Some were told the sound was part of a musical piece, while others were told the truth. The researchers measured the physical reactions of participants, such as their heart rate and blood pressure, while they were listening to the sound. Then, the participants were asked to rate how pleasant or unpleasant the noise sounded.

Those who were told the sound was a piece of music were more likely to rate the noise as less unpleasant, compared to those who knew the true source of the sound (http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2011/10/cover-your-ears.html?ref=hp). According to researchers, these findings suggest that part of the annoyance to these noises might partly be in your head. But there's also a physiological component to the displeasure.

The sound pitch, which typically hits between 2,000 and 4,000 hertz, is

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naturally amplified by the shape of human ear canals, according to researchers. Most of the participants, regardless of how they rated the sound, admitted they had higher heart rates and blood pressure to some of the sounds. The findings will be presented at the Acoustical Society of America annual meeting in San Diego this week.

Research (http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/11/chalkboard-fingernail-sound/) thought these sounds were so maddening because they are similar to primate warning calls. But that theory didn't stick. Others

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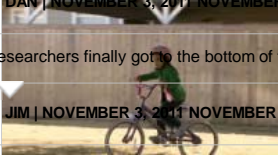
USER COMMENTS

I blame the researchers for my fingernails falling off or chipping away.

POSTED BY: DAN | NOVEMBER 3, 2011 NOVEMBER 3, 2011, 11:56 AM

I am glad researchers finally got to the bottom of this.

POSTED BY: JIM | NOVEMBER 3, 2011 NOVEMBER 3, 2011, 3:54 PM



Nails on a chalkboard don't bother me at all. I used to do it in school to annoy others. What I can't stand is the sound of a metal shovel scraping across concrete. I guess that's the same concept, but different stimuli.

POSTED BY: JEAN | NOVEMBER 3, 2011 NOVEMBER 3, 2011, 3:54 PM

Teeth on a chalk board would be less annoying than the promise of an interesting research study that is not interesting at all.

POSTED BY: DARIUS | NOVEMBER 4, 2011 NOVEMBER 4, 2011, 6:29 PM

I think this study could go a bit further by researching the effects of some noises on autistic people -specifically, their ear canals. Recently, another study noted the similarities in the shape of the head and facial features of autistics and development in the womb.

POSTED BY: DEBBY | NOVEMBER 6, 2011 NOVEMBER 6, 2011, 3:17 AM

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