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SCIENCE FINGERNAILS + CHALKBOARD = CRINGE, BUT WHY?

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Do you hate the screech that's associated with fingernails running down a chalkboard? Are you already cringing just thinking about it?

If you have ever wondered why this sound is so horrible, a new study is saying it's not just your ear disliking it but you probably don't like to visualize it either.

Let's do a quick experiment.

Listen to this (Warning: you're about to get goosebumps):

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Now watch this:

Was one worse than the other?

Believe it or not, there have been several studies as to why so many people don't like this sound. According to [Wired](#), theories have ranged from it being similar to a primate warning call to a general aversion to medium pitch sounds. But the latest research by musicologists from the University of Vienna and Macromedia University for Media and Communication in Cologne, Germany, is that both our anatomy and psychology react negatively to the sound.

Wired explains:

[Researchers] looked at other sounds that generate a similar reaction — including chalk on slate, styrofoam squeaks, a plate being scraped by a fork, and the ol' fingernails on blackboard.

Some participants were told the genuine source of the sound, and others were told that the sounds were part of a contemporary music composition. Researchers asked the participants to rank which were the worst, and also monitored physical indicators of distress — heart rate, blood pressure and the electrical conductivity of skin.

They found that disturbing sounds do cause a measurable physical reaction, with skin conductivity changing significantly, and that the frequencies involved with unpleasant sounds also lie firmly within the range of human speech — between 2,000 and 4,000 Hz. Removing those frequencies from the sound made them much easier to listen to. But, interestingly, removing the noisy, scraping part of the sound made little difference.

From a psychological standpoint, if subjects were told the sound was coming from nails on a chalkboard, they were more likely dislike the sound compared to those who were told it was part of a musical composition. Perhaps this is because if you know the source of the sound, you can picture it and even imagine doing it. If you've ever ran your own fingers down a chalkboard, you know it doesn't feel good.

So, what's worse to you: the sound of it or the feeling (watching) of it?

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