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Why Certain Sounds — Like Fingernails on a Chalkboard — Drive Us Crazy

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By *Jennipher Walters*



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What's the worst sound you can think of? I bet [fingernails \(#\)](#) scratching down a chalkboard is one of them. (And, for me, just writing about it makes me shudder!) Turns out, there's a reason why we universally dislike certain sounds.

It has to do with the shape of the human ear. According to a [new study](#) (<http://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20111104/why-fingernails-on-a-chalkboard-irks-you>), the anatomy of the ear canal amplifies sounds at high-pitch frequencies, making them actually louder to our ears and therefore uncomfortable.

But our reaction isn't *just* physical. It's also mental. Researchers also found that people perceive high-pitch frequencies differently depending on if they're told the sound is coming from fingernails on a chalkboard or is a part of contemporary music. In the study, people who knew they were listening to nails on a chalkboard rated the sound as more unpleasant and were more stressed than those who

believed they were listening to music.

Interesting stuff, huh? Do you find the nails-on-a-chalkboard sound unbearable?



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