

# Is Your Family's Chewing and Slurping Driving You Insane? Here's What to Do

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Many of us know the experience of feeling enraged while sitting with a friend or a family member who's eating a little loudly and that sound makes you want to scream.

Now we're spending all of our time quarantined with the same family or friends, and every bite, chew, crunch and slurp is so LOUD.

For some of us, it's worse than for others, and the subtle, seemingly irrational reaction can actually be heightened among people we know well.

It's called "misophonia," said Zachary Rosenthal, a psychology professor at Duke University. That term means "hatred of sound." We can all be bothered by annoying or gross-seeming sounds, he said, but some people actually experience an abnormal fight-or-flight response.

Rosenthal, who leads Duke's [Center for Misophonia and Emotional Regulation](#), described one patient's experience, who even told him hearing someone chew loudly would feel like "there was a grizzly bear in the room with them."

He said that up to 15% or 20% of the population may display symptoms of misophonia, based on findings from various researchers. In one [study](#) researchers at the University of South Florida asked 483 undergraduate students about how they reacted to sounds. About one in five self-reported misophonia symptoms.

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For those with misophonia, "sounds go right to the amygdala and set off the fight-or-flight response," said Jennifer Brout, a clinical child psychologist and the director of the International Misophonia Research Network. "The mind interprets it as toxic or harmful."

Rosenthal echoed her, noting, "It can feel panicky, but it's not a panic attack." Rather, the person is just "wired to respond to cues as if they're more threatening than they are."

One curious part about the burgeoning field of misophonia research, Brout noted, is that it can often be worse with those we live with. And that's one key clue into unraveling the deeper mystery of it.

Misophonia is likely associated with memory, Brout said. We have visceral recollections of people close to us chewing loudly or clicking their long fingernails on the table as they talk. Maybe they're sniffing too much and it drives us up the wall.

We then are almost neurologically trained to home in on that sound again and again. When meeting new people, there isn't a specific annoying behavior to focus on, and it takes a little while to settle on a particular trigger.

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