

Misophonia Survival Guide

8 misophonia coping techniques
you can start using today

FREE



Introduction

Hello and welcome! Thank you for downloading the *Misophonia Survival Guide*. I'm Tom, editor of *Allergic to Sound*.

The question I'm most often asked by readers is whether there are any techniques that we can use to help us cope with misophonia triggers. How can we stop this from ruling our lives?

Let's start with the good news. You are already on the right path. Just discovering that this disorder has a name, and is real, puts you in the driving seat.

Remember the very first time you heard about it? Amazing wasn't it?

Many of us have spent a large proportion of our lives thinking that we had something horribly wrong with us and that's a horrible feeling. Knowing that this is a genuine disorder is a validation, a weight off the shoulders. We're no longer being haunted by the unknown.

And because misophonia finally has a name, it also means that we can finally connect with one another and empathise and share stories.

If you've ever tried explaining what misophonia is like to someone who doesn't have it... well, I'm sure you can fill in the rest.

What follows in this report is a set of tips techniques that you may find helpful.

I want to stress that this does not constitute medical advice and these are not cures. These are coping mechanisms that have personally helped me and/or have helped other *Allergic to Sound* readers with misophonia.

I hope you will find them useful to.

1. Always have a set of earphones on you



Everyone with misophonia does this anyway, but it's worth repeating.

Keep a set earphones with you at all times and make sure you use them if you need to.

Don't sit there boiling over if you're having an misophode. Put on some music, or a podcast or an audible book and block out or dampen the triggers.

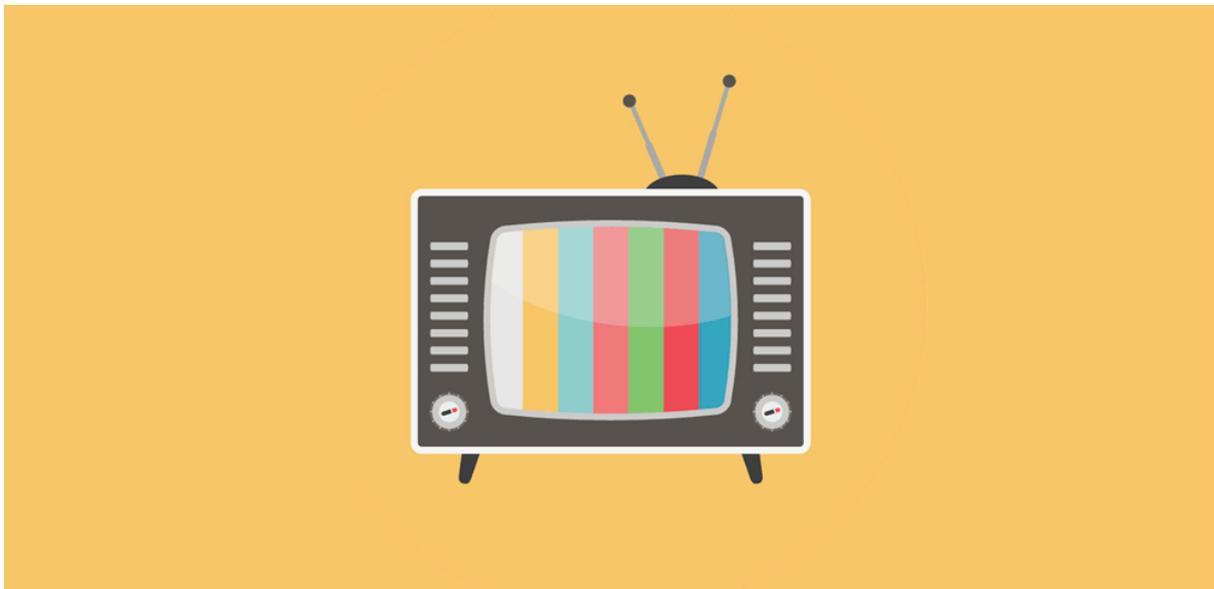
Earphones are invaluable on public transport but can also be incredibly useful in work or study situations. If you think you might need permission to wear earphones at your organisation, try speaking to an understanding teacher or boss.

In some situations it might be easier to explain that you're more productive when you listen to classical music for example (sounds classy) as it helps you to block out distractions.

You don't even need to go into your misophonia with them if you don't want to – most people get the concept that being able to focus on your work without distractions is better for a lot of people.

If you frame your request in such a way that's positive for them (i.e. they'll get more work out of you) it should be a win win situation.

2. Put on background noise during mealtimes



Play some music, put the TV on or any kind of background sound.

This might sound counterintuitive – adding sound to sound – but the background noise does two things. It helps to drown out the triggers and it distracts the brain.

Yes, you will still experience triggers but they will be less intense than if you were in an environment where the only thing you can hear is eating sounds.

If you are in a relationship – and mealtimes are becoming particularly fraught – you could also try sitting beside your partner rather than opposite them. This will help to keep the misokinesia (visuals) to a minimum and may also lessen the impact of the trigger sounds, simply because of the way sound travels.

3. Stay on top of your stress levels



Easier said than done, I know. By this I specifically mean your health and stress levels outside of your misophonia.

The more relaxed you are in other areas of your life, the better you will be at coping with triggers.

Yes, you will still trigger (and being less stressed won't magically alter your brain and body's physiological reaction) but your ability to cope will be boosted significantly.

You will have more headspace to react faster and deploy other coping mechanisms during a misophode.

Make sure you get good quality sleep every night, try to exercise (long walks in the park are great) and get plenty of fresh air.

It's also worth trying mindfulness or meditation each day (even if it's just for 10 – 20 minutes). Headspace have a fantastic app which has a free set of mindfulness sessions. If you like it you can choose to subscribe, but the free sessions are excellent as standalones and you can simply repeat them if you wish.

4. Have an escape plan for emergencies



You're in the middle of a misophode and you feel like you're about to explode. It's a state of total panic and you worry that any moment you might do something you're going to regret.

Maybe you'll say something unkind... or get caught mimicking... or roar in frustration. So what do you do?

Take a tactical time out!

If you have reached your limit find a way to politely excuse yourself. Here are the phrases that I find work well:

"I need to go to the toilet/bathroom."

"I'm going to grab a glass of water (you can replace this with any drink), can I grab you one?"

"I'm just going outside for some fresh air."

"Does anyone want a tea or a coffee?"

"I've just realised I've forgotten my [insert item here], I'm just going to go get it, catch you later."

"Do you mind if I excuse myself? I've got this deadline that I really need to hit."

"I'm just going to get some salt/pepper/ketchup, can I get you anything?"

"I don't want to be late for my appointment so I'm going to head off a little earlier."

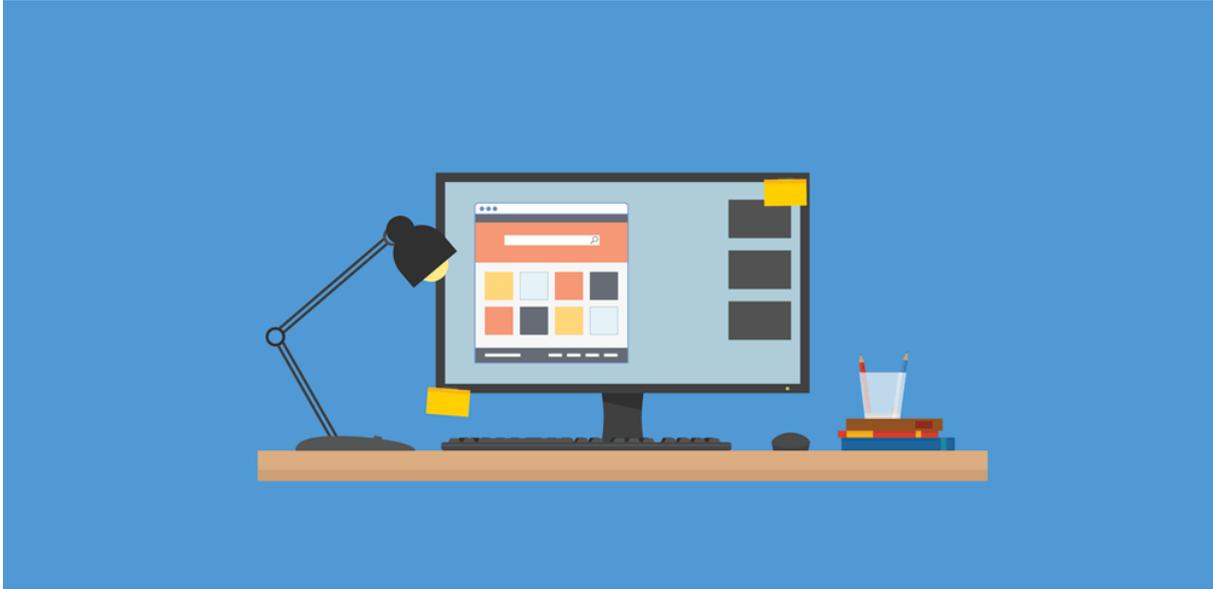
These are just a few examples and you'll find some work better than others in different environments. For example I often use the tea one at work.

The good thing is you don't actually have to lie. If you say that you're going to the bathroom people won't ask why (and if they do, you might want to hang out with less creepy people!).

When you go the bathroom, lock the door and try to physically shake it out of your system (try doing jazz hands and a bit of a shimmy, seriously!). Take some deep breaths, sit down if you need to and splash your face with cold water – you'll feel much better.

Try, where possible, to turn the negative effects of misophonia into something positive. Misophodes are, let's face it, unbearable at times – so why not suck out the poison from the situation and try to create a silver lining. A couple of the above escape plans have acts of kindness weaved in – for example the offer of getting someone a drink. You get to remove yourself from the situation, reset yourself AND make friends in the process. Bingo!

5. Request a quiet desk or work from home days



If you're in full time employment the office can be a personal hell.

Colleagues eating at their desks... fidgeting and clicking, coughing and spluttering. It's a daily torture.

Don't suffer in silence – speak to your boss about it.

You'll be the best judge about whether you to tell him or her about the misophonia (that's up to you) but whatever you do, explain that you get your best work done where there are no distractions – no phones ringing or people chatting.

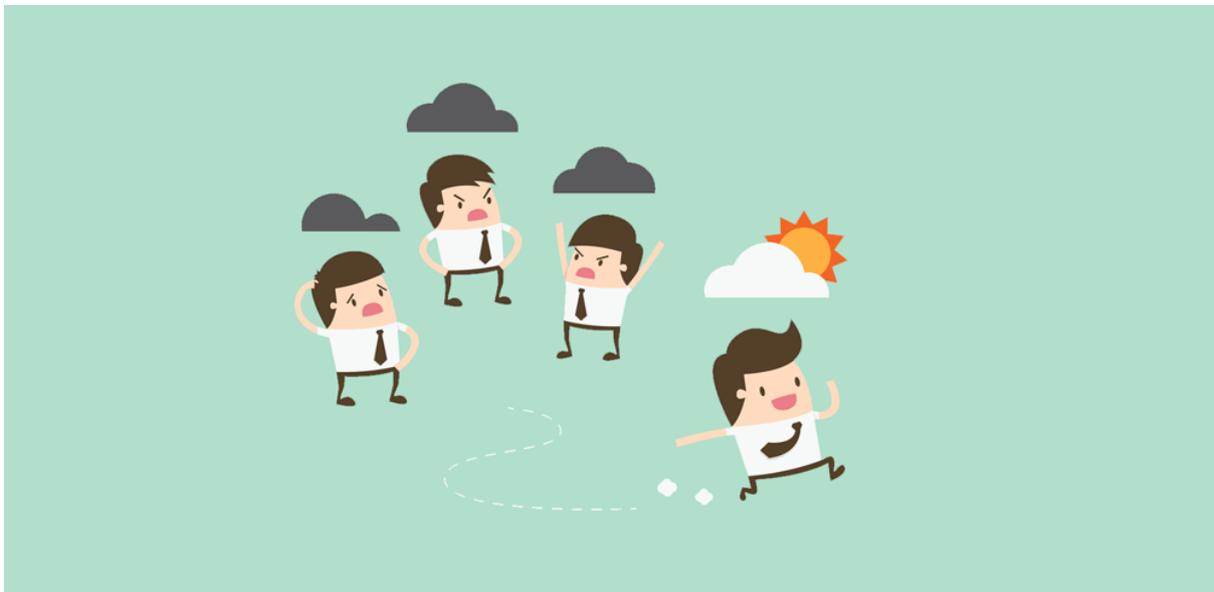
See if there's a quiet desk or room in the office where you can work when you're feeling stressed or you really need to concentrate.

Tip: Meeting rooms are a great place to get some quiet time when they're not booked up.

Also see you can work from home one day a week. I do this and it has changed my life – only having to cope with 4 instead of 5 days of work

triggers each week is a huge, huge help and has greatly lowered my overall stress levels.

6. Avoid lashing out during a misophode



Staying calm and not lashing out is easier said than done. That rush of feelings during a misophode can be overwhelming.

It will feel like you want to physically stop the source of the noise... or scream... or tell them to stop.

I've never met a violent misophone but it's easy to say something cruel in the heat of the moment. Something that you wouldn't normally say in a million years.

If you have a deep and connected relationship with the person making the noise (and they know and truly understand how misophonia can affect you) then you may be able to let them know, gently, that you need some space or are being affected by a noise.

However, on the whole it's best to try to avoid confrontation because it often makes things worse.

If the people around you are on edge, you'll be on edge too and the situation will escalate.

Think of situations outside of misophonia. What normally happens if you yell at someone and tell them to stop doing something?

They get upset or they do the opposite.

There's a strange 'you can't tell me what to do' quirk embedded in most of us. I don't know about you, but if someone tells me not to push a red button I spend the entire time wanting to push the red button.

Add to that a negatively charged, emotional tone to the request (and during a misophode it's very hard to do anything calmly!) and you're even less likely to get the desired outcome.

At best the person you're speaking to will get defensive and at worst they'll carry on with renewed vigour. And if they do stop temporarily both you and person who was scolded will feel defensive and self-conscious.

Try using some of the techniques we've talked about, like politely excusing yourself from the situation until you've had time to reset.

7. Know the science behind your misophonia



We are learning more and more about this disorder each year. One thing we do know, with a degree of certainty, is which areas of the brain are affected when we hear trigger sounds.

fMRI scans have revealed that it's the amygdala that's activated.

The amygdala is cluster of almond shaped nuclei buried deep within the temporal lobes of the brain. This is the primordial, alarm centre of the brain and is responsible for processing danger signals.

When someone with misophonia is exposed to a trigger sound, we know that the amygdala is activated and initiates what is known as the 'freeze-fight-flight' response, or survival mode.

The body releases adrenaline and cortisone – hormones which increase the heart rate and levels of alertness and readies our body to react to a perceived threat.

The problem for anyone with misophonia is that in reality there is no threat or danger.

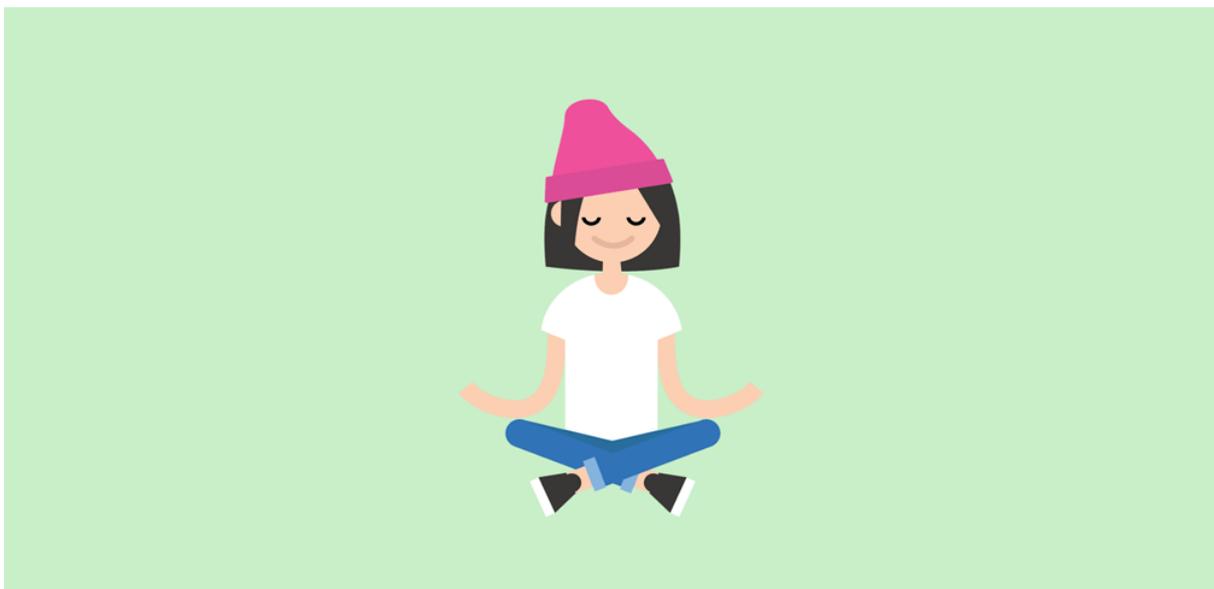
There is nothing inherently dangerous about someone eating soup loudly, or chewing gum, but unfortunately the amygdala doesn't know that.

For whatever reason it interprets these noises as danger signals – akin to a human or a wild animal acting in an aggressive or threatening way.

We currently don't have an effective way to halt or rewire this response but there is some fantastic research underway.

In the meantime just knowing and understanding what is really happening, during what is otherwise a confusing, disorientating and frightening experience can be a help in itself.

8. Focus on your breathing and remind yourself that it's the misophonia and not the person making the noise



There are two paths we can take in dealing with misophonia triggers.

One is to roll with that instinctive feeling that the source of the trigger (the person making the sound) is to blame and to focus all our (negative) energy on that.

The second is to do everything we can to resist that feeling, to try and rationalise what's happening and focus on and understand our own body's response.

This is not easy, in fact it's incredibly hard – the hardest thing on this list – but it is one of the most important.

Focus on your breathing and allow yourself to notice the changes in your body, like the quickening heart rate.

You may still feel some hurt, upset or anger towards the person making the sound and that's ok, but if you can have a parallel narrative running in your head – one in which the 'rational' you is explaining to yourself that this is your body and that it's reacting in this way because of a neurological event (as covered in the previous point) it will help in a number of ways.

Firstly, it will help you to dehumanise the trigger. This means that you can recover faster once the noise stops because you've already started to detach blame from the situation.

Secondly, it can help improve your long-term relationships. If you keep the narrative going (that Misophonia is a neurological disorder, rather than someone else doing this to you) you'll start to see your friends and family in a different light.

Misophonia can be extremely hard on relationships, so anything we can do here is worth trying.

Right! That's the end of this report. I do hope you found some of these tips helpful.

Please keep checking back on the website for news and updates and if you have a moment, do let me know what misophonia coping techniques you use in your day to day life.

Tom
Allergic to Sound