



EXISTENTIALLY ELIZABETH

WHEN EVERYDAY SOUNDS BECOME A WELFARE ISSUE

Misophonia is a condition documented in humans where otherwise harmless everyday sounds trigger disproportionate emotional reactions. The proverbial 'nails on the chalkboard' comes to mind. For me it is a dog incessantly licking. For someone else it might be the sound of someone smacking as they chew, drumming fingers, clicking a pen or repeatedly clearing a throat. Most people wouldn't even notice these sounds, but almost everyone has that one sound that makes their blood pressure spike, drives them to distraction, peaks their irritation, and makes them want to crawl out of their skin and escape as quickly as possible.

In dogs, reaction to sudden and loud noises, aka "Noise Sensitivity" has many parallels to our Misophonia.

Most breeders and experienced owners are familiar with dogs that struggle during thunderstorms or fireworks. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that canine noise sensitivity extends far beyond the classic "storm phobia" case. A recent study published in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* examined how dogs respond not only to loud aversive sounds, but also to ordinary household and human-generated noises that many owners may overlook entirely.

Researchers surveyed 809 dog owners internationally, evaluating canine reactions to three broad categories of sounds:

- Aversive Sounds (AS): fireworks, thunderstorms, gunshots, sirens
- Environmental Sounds (ES): vacuum cleaners, lawn equipment, construction, trucks, appliances, loud noises on TV
- Human Sounds (HS): coughing, sneezing, crying babies, raised voices, hiccups, chewing, door knock, and similar noises

Not surprisingly, fireworks and thunderstorms produced the strongest overall reactions. Nearly 60% of surveyed dogs reacted negatively to fireworks, and over 55% reacted to thunderstorms. However, one of the study's more important findings was that many dogs also displayed significant distress toward commonplace household sounds. Vacuum cleaners, construction noise, garbage trucks, lawn mowers, phone notifications, and even microwave beeps were identified as triggers.

Perhaps most striking were the reports involving human-produced sounds. Some dogs reacted strongly to coughing, sneezing, crying babies, raised voices, or even keys jingling. One owner described a dog that became distressed whenever the owner coughed, responding with pacing, whining, yawning, pawing, and licking behavior. Another reported that smartphone notifications triggered fear responses comparable to thunderstorms.

For breeders and longtime dog owners, the implications are significant. These findings suggest that what we often interpret as "quirky" or "sensitive" behavior may actually represent **chronic welfare stress**. The authors noted that some owners scored their dogs' reactions at the maximum severity level of 100/100, including reactions to ordinary daily sounds such as vacuum cleaners or coughing.

The study also reinforced several patterns seen in previous behavioral research:

- Dogs with existing anxiety disorders showed significantly stronger reactions to both aversive and environmental sounds.
- Older dogs (7-11 years old) tended to demonstrate more severe sound reactivity, particularly toward fireworks and storms, with a 3.4% increase in fear response with each additional year of age. However, dogs 12 years and over demonstrated lessening of fear response, likely due to age related hearing loss.

One especially important takeaway for preservation breeders and owners is the reminder that sound sensitivity is not merely a nuisance trait — it may directly affect trainability, working performance, problem-solving ability, and long-term quality of life. Previous research cited in the paper found that noise-reactive dogs performed worse on cognitive and problem-solving tasks and may be more difficult to train.

For breeders, this study reinforces the value of early environmental exposure, stable paternal and maternal temperaments, careful puppy observation, and honest discussion with puppy buyers regarding behavioral soundness. It also highlights the importance of taking owner reports seriously when they describe unusual sound aversions. What appears mild early in life may intensify over time if left unmanaged. Early recognition and veterinary intervention can help mitigate degradation of the dog's quality of life.

The study broadens our understanding of what "noise sensitivity" truly means. It is no longer just about storms and fireworks. Imagine yourself faced with your Misophonia trigger on a daily basis- how well would you cope? For dogs affected by Noise Sensitivity, everyday life itself can be acoustically stressful.

Source: Chin J.T.Y., Poh S.X.L., Fernandez E.J., Hazel S.J. "Turn the volume down: Noise hypersensitivity in dogs." *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* (2025)

Thank you for welcoming us into your home,

Elizabeth