

**THE MISOPHONIA
HOLIDAY
SURVIVAL
GUIDE**

**MISOPHONIA
INTERNATIONAL**





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HOLIDAY LESSONS

Keith Jeffreys



Holidays are the worst time to have misophonia. I remember one of the first times being triggered was the opening of Christmas presents – the crinkling paper still slices through my memory. The sight of glass bowls and silver spoons at the table can induce a short-term blood pressure spike. I look for an escape and I don't see one.

This is supposed to be the happiest time of the year. I love every aspect of the holidays: the lights, the festivities, and the parties with friends, bringing children to see Santa Claus. I love every aspect of the holidays except eating food with the family.

I have sanitized my home for a misophoniatic lifestyle. You won't find a glass bowl or plate in the house. I even have plastic wine glasses. My dogs eat out of stainless steel bowls for the same reason. For my sanity, I'm willing to exchange the risk of BPA leeching into my food. But what do we do when our parents,

aunt and uncles, brothers and cousins haven't done the same?

Here are a few lessons I've learned over the years.

Honesty is the best policy. My family and some close friends know about my condition, even though I write under a pen name today. When my mother cooks, I ask her to use a wooden spoon and a stainless bowl. I ask for us to use biodegradable paper plates and bowls for the table. When someone mentions using the nicest plates in the house, I remind them that the sound bothers me. I am firm about things, but gentle all the same.

Sometimes they forget, and a gentle reminder is generally enough. When I calmly express my needs, it empowers me to be confident and loving at the same time. It sets my own mind at ease to speak the things that I feel and the sensations that overwhelm me when these sounds occur in my environment. It is important to remember that others don't experience this horror. I am convinced that no one would read a newspaper or eat cereal out of a glass bowl if they "heard" what I "hear". So remind them of what it is that you hear, and in particular how it makes you feel.

Bring your own coping mechanism. It's unfair for us to assume that others will meet our needs without some prompting or assistance. This condition does not possess everyone. So I bring my own paper plates and bowls to the party. I arrive early so that I can help set up, and I'll sneak them onto the table (on top of the rest of the plates if need be). If someone asks, I'm honest about why I'm doing so. But others generally see this as an effort to assist in the event more so than a demand for accommodation.

For overnight stays, I bring my fan and/or noise machine. If I am going to my parents, I position myself in a bedroom that opens into the living room, so that I can leave my fan running during the day. Not everyone uses white noise to cope, but don't leave home without it if you do.

Take a break now. It's ok to leave for a while and come back. I take a break before I feel overwhelmed. If someone asks me why, I simply mention that I need some quiet time. It is very important for me that I don't allow myself to be repeatedly triggered without some recharge time. For me, the condition works a bit like brain damage, in that the triggers progressively cause damage with prolonged exposure. Take as long as you need and go for a walk. Worst-case scenario, go to the bathroom for a while.

And finally, remember that while this condition tempts us with loneliness, we come together because in the long run, we were meant to live together.



Family, Holidays, Misophonia

Paul Tabachneck



The holidays are tough for people that don't have misophonia. Family members have a way of just getting deep down under each other's skin in a way no one else can, and as we've learned over the last few years, that's just as true for misophonic triggers as it is for old grudges. If you're going home or to your in-laws' for the holidays, I have no way to sugarcoat it for you: You're going to have a tough time. There are ways to make it better, though.

Pick your support person. If you're going to spend the weekend with your family and extended family, you're probably going to be spending it with people who are on a spectrum of awareness about your misophonia, as well as another spectrum of skepticism about same. Know who your most supportive relative is, and find their eyes when you need a little reassurance, or their attention when you need to vent. This part is tricky: know that they are also going through

this holiday rigmarole, and may need to vent themselves. If you're open to their non-misophonic issues, they will be more patient with what can sometimes be perceived as a one-note complaint.

Everything in moderation (including moderation). The hardest thing for me, personally, to do at family functions is to keep myself from throwing caution, and my four sheets, to the wind, and just going to town on whatever booze is available, to shut the whole thing down. This leads nowhere good, and can push all of the tensions right over the edge. My advice is to pick your limit at the beginning of the night and stick to it. Once you're at your level of comfortable self-medication, to go further is to give yourself more stuff to deal with later in the night, the next morning, and (if an explosion should happen) beyond. Just remember: Olivia Pope is a fictional character, and not a role model.

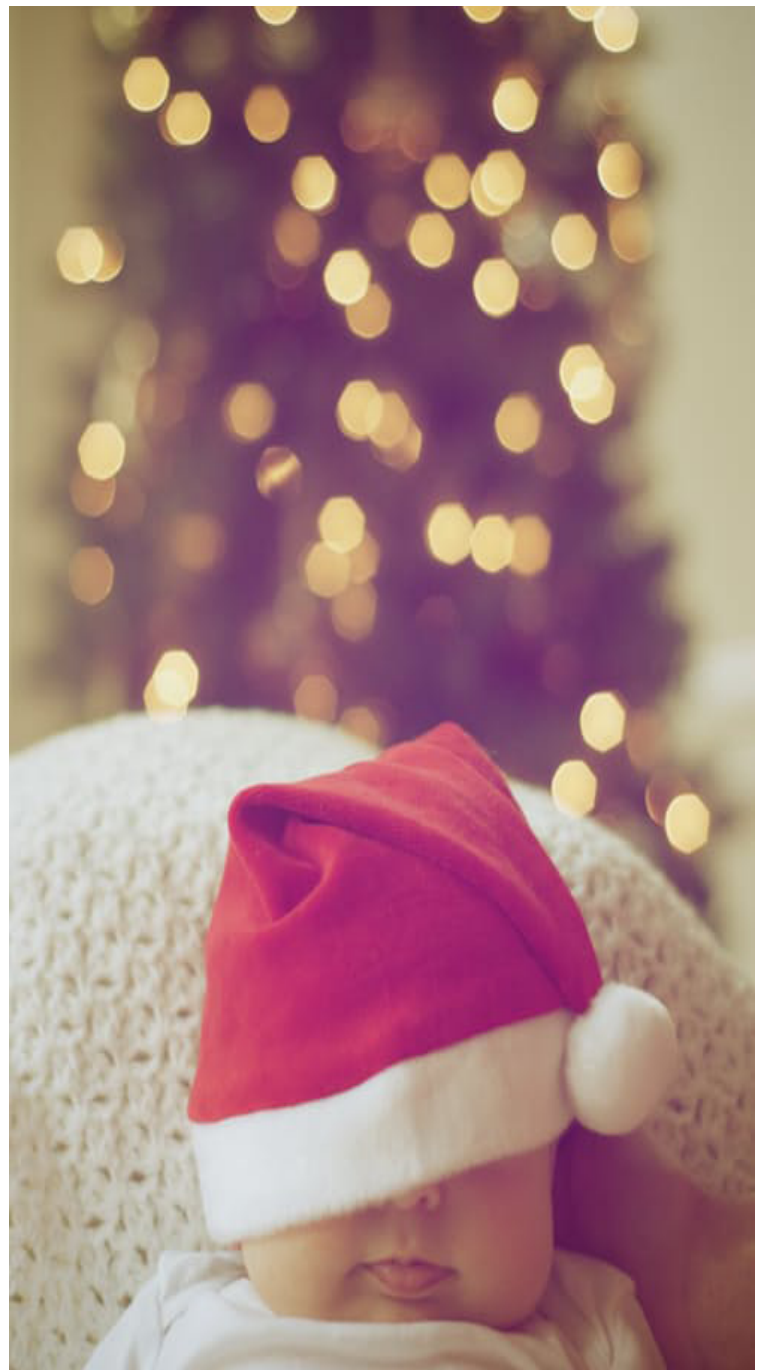
Give yourself a safe zone. You are going to need to steal away throughout this thing. Pick a place, be it a bathroom, the room you're staying in, the porch outside ("I'm getting some air" will rarely pull an objection or focus), etc, and get there when it gets to be too much. Once in awhile, ask your support person to come with, but mostly, when you're in your safe zone, give yourself time to take deep breaths, and to remind yourself that you are with people who love you, who don't know what they're doing. Find your patience, remember that you're not crazy, remember that they don't mean to harm you (even if they seem like they do), re-enter the fray.

Earplugs can be your friend. Earplugs are a last resort, right? We shouldn't wear them unless we absolutely have to. This time, you have to. I use Hearos Hi-Fidelity earplugs (and receive no compensation from Hearos), that allow me to hear people talking while filtering out the clickyscrapes and (less effectively) the slurpycrunches. It really takes the edge off, and you only occasionally have to ask people to repeat themselves (which, if they're aware of your efforts to mediate your condition, they will do with patience and love.)

This, I think, above all: Treat your family and friends with love and patience. Ours is a difficult struggle, one in which we have to both be mindful that there is greater suffering in the world, but also to care for ourselves alongside that knowledge. The best thing we can do for our loved ones is to remember that they are, in fact, our loved ones. They want us to be happy and we want the same. Misophonia means that we have to be more patient than they are, more kind, because we are the ones feeling the stabby feelings for reasons that they can't fully understand, no matter how in touch they are with our condition. They will always be on the outside of this condition, and that will always mean that we have to show them patience. It is entirely unfair — in fact, nothing about misophonia is fair — but because nobody understands us better than us,

nobody is better equipped to be our advocate than ourselves.

Obviously, there's no definitive experience here. While our condition is the same across the board, our families are wildly different, and because of this, my little list of tips should be taken with a grain of salt. These are the methods I use to get through the tough situations, and I hope they're of help to all of you. I hope also that these words find you all in good health, and that you have a very happy holiday season!



Surviving the Holidays With Misophonia

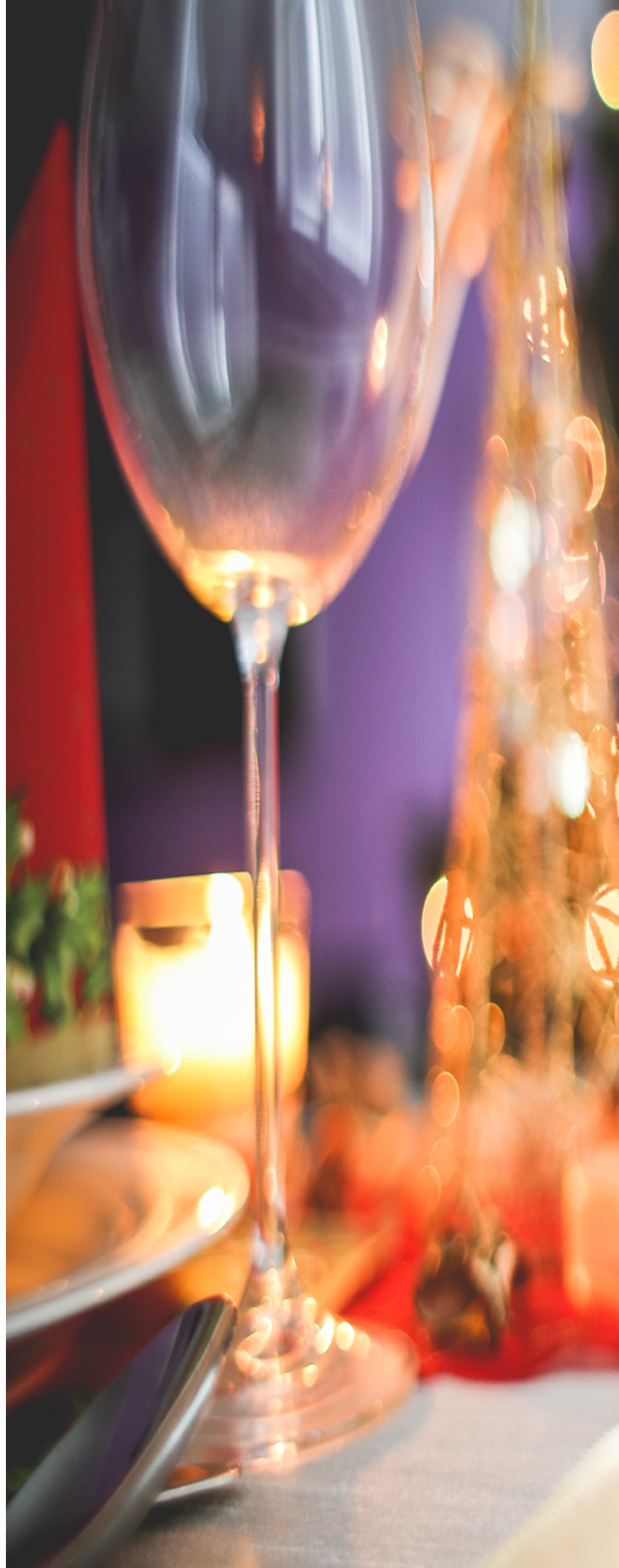
Robert Hakes

The holidays are supposed to be the most joyous time of year. Friends and family getting together, exchanging gifts, seeing people you might not see often, and of course, giant meals. For one with Misophonia, or a sensitivity to other stimulus that resembles a Misophonia like trigger, this time might not be as joyous.

As a kid, it was always exciting. Grandma prepared both Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. All my aunts and uncles were there with my cousins. The adults all sat at the big fancy adult table, and us kids sat at a smaller table. How I yearned for that adult table. By the time I was old enough, the concept of tables had disappeared, and it was mostly adults in one living room watching football and the teens in the other room watching whatever. Disappointing from a kid who wanted the adult table, a blessing for a teen who had no idea why chewing was bothering him.

So the holidays quickly changed. It was more of a hunt for the quietest spot to eat my food. I could usually find a chair far enough away from people to keep away from the triggers, but close enough to be part of the conversations. Then as people grew older, families moved, and grandparents died off, so did the massive gatherings.

My family soon made the move, so the holidays were just us. My parents, being of the Mormon faith, always had missionaries over to feed during the dinners. I usually used that as my excuse to hide in my room to eat. The real reason was my dad's chewing. Despite 17 years of talking about my disorder, he still hasn't learned how to eat even a gummy bear without making a ton of noise.



All is not lost, however. If you have a family who knows about and somewhat understands your Misophonia, a simple low volume white noise of sorts, or music playing in headphones should be enough to drown out the triggers, but make sure you're not out of the conversation. There are also noise cancelling ear buds, which are a great alternative. I personally use the passive VMODA buds, as they are cheap, reliable, and completely reusable. They drown out enough noise without having a sound in your ear, and are rather comfortable.

There are still other stimulus that can be a problem, such as tactile. Some people have a problem sitting still, and that can cause a trigger just like any sound can. You're around friends and family, if you are aware of their habits, cater to that. Find a place at the table where you can sit without their inability to stay still will trigger you.

If you're of age, people have reported that alcohol consumption has lowered their stress during a trigger. I'm not going to condone alcohol abuse, but a drink or two to get a good feeling going could help take some of the edge off. Once again, please be responsible. A couple of grandpa's special eggnogs should be sufficient.

If all else fails, excuse yourself and let everyone know you will be back. There is no shame in avoiding triggers. Everyone has different levels of severity, and some people may not be able to use the coping methods mentioned in this story of mine. This Thanksgiving was the first Thanksgiving in years that I spent with people and not in my room alone, but I choose to spend it with my girlfriend and her friends, so a place where I was free to move about.

You don't want to let Misophonia rule and define your life, but at the same time, you want to enjoy your holidays. Think about some of these options, and give it a try at your next big family holiday dinner. You might find it more pleasant than before.



KEEPING THE SEASON BRIGHT

Shaylynn Hayes

As a Canadian, the holiday season comes with an extra layer of chill. When spending the days and nights with family members, I am constantly reminded that Misophonia can rear its head at any moment. The best way to deal with this, in my opinion, is not head on. Instead, I like to take a quieter approach. Sensory stimuli is everywhere during the holidays — bright lights, noises, chomping, and 'cheer'. But, if you look closely, there's also a lot of great opportunities for sensory calming. The following are ways that you can keep your anxieties low, and reprieve from the after-math of too much celebrating. If you haven't yet, I recommend you [read the short Sensory Diet](#) by Susan Nesbit on our website.

- A warm bath with or without essential oils
- Sitting by the fire with cocoa. Bonus points if you have a book
- A family Christmas/Holiday movie (sans popcorn)
- A stroll in the snow
- Wrapping presents (even last minute) is a great way to organize your brain, and it can feel great sensory-wise
- Make Christmas/Holiday crafts
- Color pictures
- Bake Christmas/Holiday cookies

Most of all you should focus on the quiet moments of joy. Not all of the holiday festivities have to involve a lot of noise. Not all of them even require other persons. Try to keep yourself calm and happy so that when family moments come along you're well rested and ready to enjoy!



Victoria MacNeil Leblanc

Misophonia can have a major, negative impact on any relationship you're in.

This is the sad truth for the majority of sufferers out there. A lot of misophonia sufferers end up fighting with their families quite a bit. It can be hard for anyone to share a living space with their parents and siblings, doubly so when they have misophonia. A lot of my memories of my childhood include quite a bit of fighting with my parents. We are very close now and always have had great relationships, but there was a lot of arguing and emotions. Luckily, I'm an only child, because I can only assume that I would have lost my mind if I had to deal with a loud younger sibling or an older sibling who wouldn't respect me, and whatever else people with siblings had to go through. My parents are my biggest triggers, as much as they avoid triggering me. My dad loves music and works with music. This means that he listens to it all the time, which would drive me crazy as a child. Some people like having the television on as background noise, but he likes listening to the oldies radio station. Hearing muffled noises triggers me and I would hear them for hours at a time, which was my version of hell. This became way worse when he got an expensive, powerful sound system that provides clearer, louder music that can be heard basically throughout our entire house. I've thought of stealing the remote to that stereo and snapping it many times. He would also never use headphones when he would play computer games or work on his sound effects and music cues for his job as a sound tech for a theatre, which meant that every few months he would spend hours on end creating a whole new sound script for the play his workplace was performing. He often just told me to stay upstairs on those days.

The most common, universal issue for misophonia sufferers is dealing with family meals.

A lot of families hold dinners near and dear to their hearts, as it is, ideally, a time where everyone gets together and enjoys a meal together while they have a nice conversation. This can be nearly impossible for sufferers. The thought of being within a few feet of a group of people chewing and talking and using utensils can be a nightmare, yet so many people are forced to eat with their families. Large parties with extended family can be even worse, like holiday dinners, as eating dinner together goes from a few people like your parents and siblings at the table to suddenly including all of your aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, and grandparents.

The problem is that a lot of family members find that misophonia sufferers are either faking it or trying to control them. Of course, we know this is not true, but it is understandable. Reactions to being triggered can often be very noticeable and might seem dramatic to people who don't suffer from misophonia. Here's the positive part: There are ways to avoid a lot of common fights. It starts with knowledge. If you nicely let your family know that you do have this neurological disorder and that you'd appreciate their help, chances are that they will attempt to help you. Using coping methods is also a major help. There's no reason to eat dinner silently, so try putting on some white noise or music in the background. If you know you're going to be triggered, like it's taco night and you hate crunching noises, just don't eat together on that specific night.

Families may also find ways to avoid triggering you entirely. For example, they might learn to just not eat snacks if you're in the room. If their nose is stuffy or running, they may just blow it instead of sniffing or breathing loudly. Fights are caused by a lack of understanding, so you can avoid them by spreading awareness and information. Remember, families are meant to love and support you.



Holiday Survival List

by Sharon Mousel



The holidays are a very difficult time for some people, especially for those suffering with misophonia. With Christmas celebrations just around the corner—for those who celebrate it—those with misophonia may be dreading any family gatherings and/or Christmas dinners, as well as people gathering around to open presents. They may be wondering what to do, and how they're going to survive another Christmas bombarded with triggers. I've compiled a list of what you can do to survive. I am aware that there are a lot of people who have family members who don't know about misophonia, or who do know, but make you stay anyway. Regardless, I hope what I have to say helps you in some way.

1. If you must be present, try to sit as far away from others as you can. If you're sitting at a table, try sitting on the edge of the table, away from most conversations and triggers. This may help in excusing yourself quietly while other people are engaged in conversation.

2. Earplugs can help dull the triggers around you. Earplugs have saved me during many meal-times. Earplugs also make it so that you can hear yourself eating, which dulls other eating sounds. This has worked for me, but I know that there are people who can't wear earplugs because it hurts their ears, or the sound of their own eating triggers them. This leads me to my next tip if earplugs are a no-go for you.

3. Deep breathing can help calm you down and lower your heart rate. I've done this during meal-time, class, and when I go to church. If you're forced to stay at the table or with family at any occasion, perhaps this will help you as well. This helps me especially when I hear my worst trigger: S sounds. My heartbeat quickens when I hear this particular sound, which in turn makes me anxious, angrier than I already am, and desperate to get away. If earplugs don't work in dulling the sound, I immediately start deep breathing. It doesn't make the trigger go away, but I feel less likely to hurt myself, and I feel a little calmer. My heartbeat

slows and I feel like I can tolerate the sound, at least for a little while longer.

4. Leaving the room to calm down. I've mentioned this a few times, but if you feel really overwhelmed with all the triggers, you should try to leave and calm down before going back out to your family. There's no shame in leaving when you need to. I know there are people who have families who make a huge deal out of them leaving because of something that triggered them. They don't understand, and they don't know what you need. I suggest telling them about misophonia if you haven't already. If you have, and they still don't believe you, keep trying and keep doing what you need to do in order to not be triggered.

5. Headphones (over-the-ear, or in-ear): If earplugs aren't for you, perhaps investing in some headphones to dull the triggers around you will work best for you. Just exercise caution when putting the volume on "high". I have a pair of over-the-ear black Bluedio Bluetooth wireless headphones that I got on Black Friday for a great price. I believe they were originally about \$60, but I got them for about \$24. I personally prefer over-the-ear because it dulls more sounds, even though my ears hurt after a long time of wearing them. For me, that's a small price to pay to keep myself from getting triggered. If you want to get in-ear headphones, I recommend going here: <https://www.misophonaiinternational.com/earplugsheadphones/> There are some good in-ear/over-the-ear headphones and earplug suggestions. I've downloaded a few apps on my phone that play a range of noises that dull all outside noises if I want to:

a. A Soft Murmur: Plays white noise, waves, thunder, and rain. You have the option of purchasing more sounds. You can tweak the intensity of whichever one you want to play. You can play all at the same time if you want, at different levels of intensity (low to high). I use this all the time. A Soft Murmur is also a website, where you can listen to all the sounds

for free.

b. White Noise Free (by TMSOFT): This is my least favorite one. There are more sounds to choose from. I've listed them here if you want to look at them:

- i. brown noise, blue noise, violet noise, white noise
- ii. amazon jungle
- iii. beach waves crashing, ocean waves crashing
- iv. camp fire
- v. blowing wind, thunder storm
- vi. rain on car roof, rain storm, light rain pouring, heavy rain pouring, extreme rain pouring, dishwasher rinsing
- vii. boat swaying in water, water dripping, running shower, water sprinkler, stream water flowing, running water
- viii. cat purring, crickets chirping, frogs at night
- ix. air conditioner, oscillating fan, vacuum cleaner
- x. grandfather clock, Tibetan singing bowl
- xi. clothes dryer, hair dryer blowing
- xii. chimes chiming
- xiii. airplane travel, train ride
- xiv. cars driving, city streets
- xv. crowded room
- xvi. heartbeat

Though there are more sounds to choose from without paying, you can't do anything else with your phone. You must stay in the app for the sounds to play. If you want to browse Facebook on your phone, the sounds won't continue playing. Also, you can't choose to listen to two or more at the same time. It's one or the other.

c. Some people have also suggested Rainy Mood. In the Android app store, it's \$2.99 and the rating is 4.1 out of 5 stars. I haven't tried this for myself, but I've heard good things about it.

I hope you've found this to be useful. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas, if you celebrate it, and if not, Happy Holidays. I hope you enjoy this time with your family despite any triggers that you may encounter.

