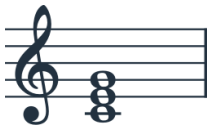The diminished triad

Major and minor are the two chords you already know. There is a third one, built from **two minor thirds stacked on top of each other** — and it is the most restless chord in music. It is written **B°** or **Bdim**.

SQUEEZE THE TRIAD, ONE NOTE AT A TIME

C major
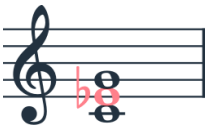
C – E – G



big third, then small. Bright and settled.

C minor
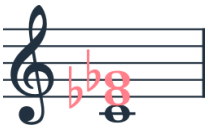
C – E♭ – G



small third, then big. The 3rd dropped a half step.

C diminished

C – E♭ – G♭



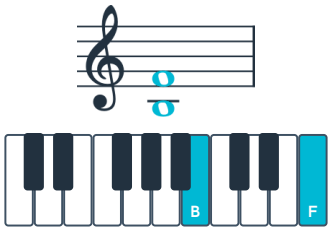
small third, then small. The 5th dropped too — the chord is squeezed.

Coral marks the note that just moved down. Minor lowers the 3rd; diminished lowers the 3rd *and* the 5th.

WHY IT SOUNDS RESTLESS: THE TRITONE
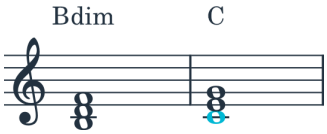
Squeezing the 5th turns it into a **diminished 5th** — six half steps, the interval old musicians nicknamed the **tritone**. It is the one interval that sounds like it is leaning on something.

Count it on the keys: B to F is **six half steps**, exactly half an octave. Split the octave straight down the middle and neither note can win — so the ear insists that something move.



WHERE YOU MEET IT: THE CHORD ON THE 7TH DEGREE

Build a triad on **every** note of the C major scale and six of them come out major or minor. The seventh — the one starting on **B** — is diminished: **B – D – F**, no black keys needed. That tritone is B to F, and it points straight home. All seven chords of the key: Handout 357.



B° leans in and C major answers. B slides up to C, F slides down to E, and the restlessness is gone.

The same three notes are the **ii°** chord of A minor (Handout 394) — one chord, two jobs, because C major and A minor share their notes.

Try it Play **B–D–F** together and hold it. Uncomfortable, isn't it? Now move just two fingers: **B up to C** and **F down to E**, leaving D where it is. That is the whole story of the diminished triad — it exists to lean somewhere. Next: stack one more third on top and you get the **diminished 7th** (Handout 210).

LISTEN
Scan to hear every example
tissimo.co/worksheets/diminished-triad

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