



Hiccups



Hiccups are erratic and involuntary spasms of the diaphragm, involving a person's reflexes. The majority of the world's population has experienced a bout of hiccups. Thus, the sounds and feelings associated with this condition are eminently recognizable. Furthermore, most people would agree that hiccups are a particularly irritating experience. Although hiccups are a universal phenomenon, they are still somewhat of a mystery.

General Information

Scientists have been debating the mysteries of hiccups for decades. Specific theories behind the explanation of hiccups are still up for debate, but some interesting observations have surfaced. For example, although hiccups can occur at any time, they are most likely to occur in the evening. In addition, although hiccups can affect anyone at any age, scientists have discovered

that for reasons that remain unclear, males are more often affected than their female counterparts. Additionally, women who are pregnant hiccup less often than women who are not. A final observation includes that as people age, bouts of hiccups occur less frequently.

What Causes Hiccups?

The physiological process of hiccups begins with the diaphragm—the large muscle between the lungs and the stomach. When the nerve that controls the movement of the diaphragm is irritated, the diaphragm rapidly tightens, and air is quickly sucked into the lungs. This happens so quickly that the epiglottis, the tissue that covers the airway during swallowing, flaps shut and causes the vocal cords to compress together. The air that enters the body is suddenly stopped when it strikes against the closed vocal cords. It is the air hitting the vocal cords that causes the “hiccup” sound that is so universally recognized. Usually, this action repeats itself several times per minute.

There are myriad theories about the causes of hiccups. One common idea is that hiccups can be triggered by having a very full stomach—eating too much too quickly, drinking too much alcohol, or swallowing a large amount of air. It is also thought that hiccups may be caused by a sudden change in the temperature of the stomach, such as taking a cold drink while eating a hot meal. Smoking, stress, and excitement have also been blamed for hiccups. In addition, some individuals will hiccup after having a carbonated beverage. However, most experts will say that the true cause of hiccups is still a mystery.

A normal case of the hiccups persists anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. Although medical treatment is sometimes necessary when hiccups are chronic, most hiccup attacks resolve themselves without any outside interference.

Home Remedies

There are many popular home remedies that are widely believed to cure a case of the hiccups. Some of the best-known treatments include holding one's breath, eating a teaspoon of sugar, or being startled or frightened. Other remedies include breathing into a paper bag, pulling on the tongue, biting into a lemon, or drinking water from the far side of the glass.

(continued on next page)

Time _____

Level: 12.3

Lexile®: 1210L

Word Count: 917



Hiccups (continued)

Some of the home remedies for hiccups can be complicated or bizarre. For example, one home remedy says an individual should put the round end of a spoon between the points of a fork, placing the handle of the fork in a glass of water, and resting the handle of the spoon against the hiccupping person's temple. Thereafter, the victim must drink from the glass of water. Although there are probably as many ideas for cures as there are people who have suffered from the hiccups, the effectiveness of specific remedies depends largely on the individual and the particular situation.

When Hiccups Persist

If hiccups last longer than two days, they are called *persistent hiccups*. If they last longer than a month, they are called *intractable hiccups*. Individuals with persistent or intractable hiccups should seek intervention and treatment from a medical professional, as these types of hiccups are unlikely to withdraw unaided and may be a sign of a more severe condition. For example, persistent or intractable hiccups may be a sign of complications in the nervous system caused by serious injuries, infections, or cancer. They could also be caused by problems with the chemical balance of the body, unhealthy breathing, or improper functioning of the kidneys.

Unusual Cases

The most famous case of prolonged hiccups may be that of Charles Osborne, a man from Iowa who hiccupped without ceasing for 68 years, from 1922 to 1990. His unusual case was recorded in the *Guinness Book of World Records* when he was documented as the "man with the longest attack of hiccups." In the early years of his hiccups, Charles Osborne hiccupped up to 40 times every minute. In later years, the rate of hiccupping slowed down to around 20 times a minute. Despite his uncontrollable hiccupping, Charles Osborne was married twice and fathered eight children. He died one year after the hiccups stopped.

A less-extreme case is that of a teenager named Jennifer Mee from Florida. Jennifer Mee achieved a small degree of fame in 2007, when she suffered from hiccups for five straight weeks. Her hiccups disappeared as suddenly as they came but reappeared some weeks later. This caused some experts to guess that she actually suffers from Tourette syndrome. Other, less-sympathetic observers concluded that the entire episode had been an attention-seeking prank. Jennifer Mee's case, at the least, proved how widespread and popular home remedies for the hiccups really are. When Jennifer was interviewed on the "Today" show, the audience was asked to send in their suggestions for hiccup cures. The "Today" show received over 10,000 e-mails filled with ideas.





Hiccups

Comprehension Questions

Circle the best answer.

1. This passage is about
 - a. swallowing problems.
 - b. spasms of the diaphragm.
 - c. contractions of the arteries.
 - d. all of the above.

2. True or false: Men are more susceptible to hiccups than women.
 - a. true
 - b. false

3. Hiccups involve which organ in the body?
 - a. epiglottis
 - b. diaphragm
 - c. vocal cords
 - d. all of the above

4. Which of the following is a home remedy for curing hiccups?
 - a. having a full stomach
 - b. eating a teaspoon of sugar
 - c. drinking a carbonated beverage
 - d. drinking a cold beverage while eating a hot meal

5. If hiccups last longer than two days, they are called ___ hiccups.
 - a. relentless
 - b. persistent
 - c. intractable
 - d. long-lasting

6. If hiccups last longer than a month, they are called ___ hiccups.
 - a. constant
 - b. continual
 - c. persistent
 - d. intractable

7. True or false: From this passage, we can infer that persistent hiccups are quite common.
 - a. true
 - b. false

8. In the most famous case of prolonged hiccups, one man hiccupped for ___ years.
 - a. 15
 - b. 28
 - c. 45
 - d. 68



Hiccups (continued)

9. True or false: Hiccups are not caused by medical conditions.
 - a. true
 - b. false

10. From this passage, we can infer that hiccups are
 - a. common.
 - b. voluntary.
 - c. dangerous.
 - d. all of the above.

Check your answers on page 222.

Flying Cars

1. d 2. b 3. b 4. b 5. c 6. a 7. a
8. b 9. c 10. b

Genealogy

1. a 2. a 3. d 4. d 5. b 6. c 7. d
8. d 9. b 10. c

Static Electricity

1. a 2. c 3. c 4. a 5. a 6. d 7. b
8. d 9. b 10. d

Improvisational Performers

1. b 2. c 3. a 4. a 5. c 6. b 7. b
8. a 9. d 10. b

Meteor Showers

1. b 2. b 3. d 4. a 5. a 6. a 7. a
8. a 9. c 10. c

Lindsey Vonn

1. c 2. a 3. b 4. c 5. c 6. a 7. c
8. c 9. a 10. d

Ferdinand Magellan

1. a 2. d 3. b 4. b 5. c 6. b 7. c
8. d 9. b 10. d

Snoring

1. c 2. a 3. a 4. d 5. c 6. c 7. d
8. d 9. d 10. c

John Adams

1. d 2. d 3. a 4. c 5. a 6. b 7. b
8. b 9. a 10. d

Burj Khalifa

1. b 2. a 3. b 4. b 5. d 6. a 7. d
8. c 9. d 10. b

Dolly, the Cloned Sheep

1. b 2. a 3. d 4. d 5. a 6. c 7. c
8. b 9. c 10. a

Bounty Hunters

1. c 2. b 3. a 4. a 5. c 6. c 7. a
8. a 9. d 10. b

Empress Dowager Cixi

1. d 2. b 3. a 4. b 5. b 6. c 7. d
8. b 9. c 10. a

Spontaneous Combustion

1. c 2. b 3. c 4. a 5. c 6. c 7. d
8. c 9. c 10. b

Michelangelo Buonarroti

1. d 2. a 3. b 4. c 5. a 6. b 7. a
8. d 9. c 10. c

Renaissance Fairs

1. d 2. c 3. a 4. d 5. a 6. d 7. a
8. a 9. c 10. b

Hypnotists

1. b 2. b 3. b 4. d 5. b 6. c 7. d
8. c 9. a 10. a

William Wilberforce

1. b 2. a 3. a 4. c 5. a 6. a 7. c
8. b 9. a 10. a

Prosthetics

1. b 2. a 3. b 4. a 5. b 6. d 7. b
8. c 9. c 10. c

Bar Mitzvahs

1. a 2. a 3. b 4. b 5. d 6. a 7. c
8. d 9. d 10. a

BASE Jumping

1. b 2. d 3. b 4. d 5. a 6. a 7. c
8. b 9. d 10. b

Hiccups

1. b 2. a 3. d 4. b 5. b 6. d 7. b
8. d 9. b 10. a

Solar Flares

1. a 2. a 3. a 4. c 5. d 6. c 7. c
8. a 9. a 10. a

Jackie Robinson

1. c 2. b 3. d 4. c 5. d 6. d 7. c
8. b 9. a 10. d

The Fountain of Youth

1. a 2. d 3. d 4. b 5. b 6. d 7. a
8. a 9. d 10. b

Tornadoes

1. d 2. a 3. c 4. d 5. b 6. d 7. d
8. a 9. d 10. b

Meteorologists

1. b 2. d 3. b 4. d 5. b 6. b 7. c
8. a 9. b 10. a