

Facts You Didn't Know About Your Body

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From sneezing after sex, to the use of the appendix, meet 15 curious facts about the human body.

Our body is capable of producing aspirin

Eating fruits and vegetables may help the human body make its own aspirin. Findings from the Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry indicate that study participants who received benzoic acid, a natural substance in fruits and vegetables, could make their own salicylic acid, the key component that gives aspirin its anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties.

Taking a nap at work is good for your boss

A 20-minute nap can improve your overall alertness, boost your mood, and increase productivity. William Anthony, co-author of *The Art of Napping at Work* (Larson Publications, 1999), says the post-nap boost can last for several hours. In addition, your heart may reap benefits from napping. In a six-year study of Greek adults, researchers found that men who took naps at least three times a week had a 37 percent lower risk of heart-related death.

Ejaculation may cause men to sneeze

Some men experience pain, headaches, or sneezing as a result of ejaculation. The increased activity in the nervous system during orgasm may be the culprit in triggering headaches. A possible explanation for the sneezing is that in the brain, the center for orgasms is close to the centers for yawning and sneezing.

Every person has a unique tongue print

Just like fingerprints. The tongue is a unique organ in that it can be stuck out of mouth for inspection, and yet it is otherwise well protected in the mouth and is difficult to forge. The tongue also presents both geometric shape information and physiological texture information which are potentially useful in identity verification applications.

White skin has evolved over time

It seems we were all black ones (consistent with evolutionary fact of first humans in Africa). White skin was a result of humans moving away from the equator. Also all skin, without coloring, would appear creamy white. Near-surface blood vessels add a blush of red. A yellow pigment also tints the canvas. Lastly, sepia-toned melanin, created in response to ultraviolet rays, appears black in large amounts. These four hues mix in different proportions to create the skin colors of all the peoples of Earth.

The foot is home to the body's thickest area of skin

The skin on the palms and the soles of the feet is 4 mm thick and the thickest skin in the body, the heel portions of the feet being the thickest portions. It's also got the most sweat glands than in any other area.

The appendix isn't as useless as you think

Long denigrated as vestigial or useless, the appendix actually has a reason to be – as a “safe house” for the beneficial bacteria living in the human gut. The beneficial bacteria in the appendix that aid digestion can ride out a bout of diarrhea that completely evacuates the intestines and emerge afterwards to repopulate the gut.

The body is taller in the morning than in the evening

The body is taller in the morning than in the evening. You might want to schedule that basketball game for first thing in the morning. That's because our bodies are on average about half an inch taller in the morning, thanks to excess fluid between our discs, which is replenished while we sleep. As the day goes on, and our bodies undergo the strain of standing, the discs get compressed and the fluid seeps out, so the body loses that small bit of extra height.

Humans glow in the dark

It was revealed by ultra-sensitive cameras that our bodies emit tiny amounts of light that are too weak for the human eye to detect. Amazing pictures of "glittering" human bodies were released by Japanese scientists who have captured the first ever images of human "bioluminescence". Although it has been known for many years that all living creatures produce a small amount of light as a result of chemical reactions within their cells, this is the first time light produced by humans has been captured on camera. Strangely, the areas that produced the brightest light did not correspond with the brightest areas on thermal images of the volunteers' bodies.

The stomach produces a new lining every 3 days to avoid digesting itself with its own acids

There's one dangerous liquid no airport security can confiscate from you: It's in your gut. Your stomach cells secrete hydrochloric acid, a corrosive compound used to treat metals in the industrial world. It can pickle steel, but mucous lining the stomach wall keeps this poisonous liquid safely in the digestive system, breaking down your lunch but not your own stomach.

Body position affects your memory

Can't remember your anniversary, hubby? Try getting down on one knee. Memories are highly embodied in our senses. A scent or sound may evoke a distant episode from one's childhood. The connections can be obvious (a bicycle bell makes you remember your old paper route) or inscrutable. A recent study helps decipher some of this embodiment. An article in the January 2007 issue of *Cognition* reports that episodes from your past are remembered faster and better while in a body position similar to the pose struck during the event.

Big brains cause cramped mouths

Evolution isn't perfect. If it were, we might have wings instead of wisdom teeth. Sometimes useless features stick around in a species simply because they're not doing much harm. But wisdom teeth weren't always a cash crop for oral surgeons. Long ago, they served as a useful third set of meat-mashing molars. But as our brains grew our jawbone structure changed, leaving us with expensively overcrowded mouths.

Blondes have more hair

They're said to have more fun, and they definitely have more hair. Hair color determines how dense the hair on your head is. The average human has 100,000 hair follicles, each of which is capable of producing 20 individual hairs during a person's lifetime. Blondes average 146,000 follicles while people with black hair tend to have about 110,000 follicles. Those with brown hair fit the average with 100,000 follicles and redheads have the least dense hair, with about 86,000 follicles.

The average person expels flatulence 14 times each day

Even if you'd like to think you're too dignified to pass gas, the reality is that almost everyone will at least a few times a day. Digestion causes the body to release gases which can be painful if trapped in the abdomen and not released.

Having orgasms prevent men from prostate cancer

Two large studies, reported in 2003 and 2004, found that middle-aged men who had (or at least remember having) at least four orgasms a week throughout their 20s, 30s and 40s had a reduced risk of prostate cancer by as much as one-third. Some researchers speculate that ejaculations may clear the prostate of carcinogens.

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