

WEIRD SCIENCE

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This award-winning science makes you think *and* laugh.

Some scientists win the Nobel Prize for their work. Other scientists win the “Ig Nobel” Prize, which honors real science that is so strange, it’s funny.

“We want to make people laugh and then think,” says Ig Nobel founder Marc Abrahams. He and his colleagues pick 10 of the world’s strangest scientific studies to honor each year.

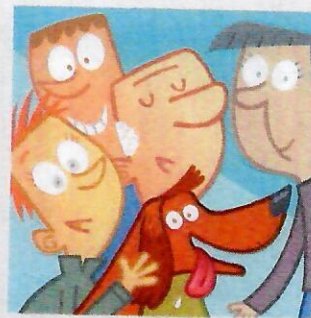
Here are some of the most bizarre Ig Nobel winners since the prize was established 24 years ago:



Did early humans eat mice?

Lots of small mammal bones are found at archaeological digs. But did the humans eat them? Archaeologists could not tell.

Winner, 2013 Archaeology Ig Nobel: A student named Brian Crandall ate a shrew (a mouse-like rodent) and observed what came out in his poop. Many bones were consumed completely by his stomach acid, but he took electron microscope photos of the bones he found so archaeologists could compare them to their digs. If they looked similar, a human probably ate them.



No-blink photos, almost guaranteed.

Why is someone always blinking in your photos? Science says: because you don't take enough pictures.

Winner, 2006

Mathematics Ig Nobel:

An Australian photographer wondered how many group shots she should take to be pretty sure no one was blinking. She found out you need to divide the number of people by 2 to figure it out. Twelve people? Take at least six photos. But with groups over 50, someone will always be caught blinking no matter how many photos you take.



Hair and string tangle by themselves.

In the morning, your hair is a tangled mess. Did the tangle fairy visit during the night? Not likely. U.S. scientists have proved hair and string tangle by themselves.

Winners, 2008 Physics Ig Nobel: Two scientists repeatedly shook a hollow ball containing string. Eventually they discovered they could predict the number of knots that would form. All they needed to know was how long and how flexible the string was.

Dung beetles navigate using the stars.

Dung beetles get their name because they eat the poop of other animals. They roll it into balls so they can roll it home. But the balls are so big they can't see over them, so how can they roll them in a straight line?

Winners, 2013 Biology/Astronomy Ig Nobel: Scientists in South Africa studied the beetles in the wild on both clear and cloudy nights. They found the beetles went straight home on clear nights but wandered around on cloudy nights. Experiments at a planetarium showed they went faster when they could see the stars, which they used to navigate their way.



Shoe socks prevent falls on ice.

If you live in a cold climate, you've probably slipped on the ice. But most people don't want to bump their rears on the ice. "Wear socks over your shoes," say scientists in New Zealand.

Winners, 2010 Physics Ig Nobel: These winners work in a town where the hills get icy in the winter and people fall down a lot. One nasty day they asked 15 people to wear socks over their shoes and walk down a hill. They told the scientists the hills felt much less slippery. And none of them fell. Most students thought it was uncool to wear socks over their shoes, though, and refused to wear them to school.

Asthma gets better after rollercoaster rides.

You know that great feeling you get after riding a rollercoaster? Dutch scientists discovered it can help asthma sufferers feel better, too.

Winners, 2010 Medicine Ig Nobel: These scientists sent 25 women with asthma on a rollercoaster, over and over. Before the rides, they were wheezing. Afterward, they said they felt better.



The five-second rule is true — sometimes.

Have you ever dropped food on the floor, said, "Five-second rule!" then grabbed it and eaten it? The idea is germs won't stick if you pick it up quick.

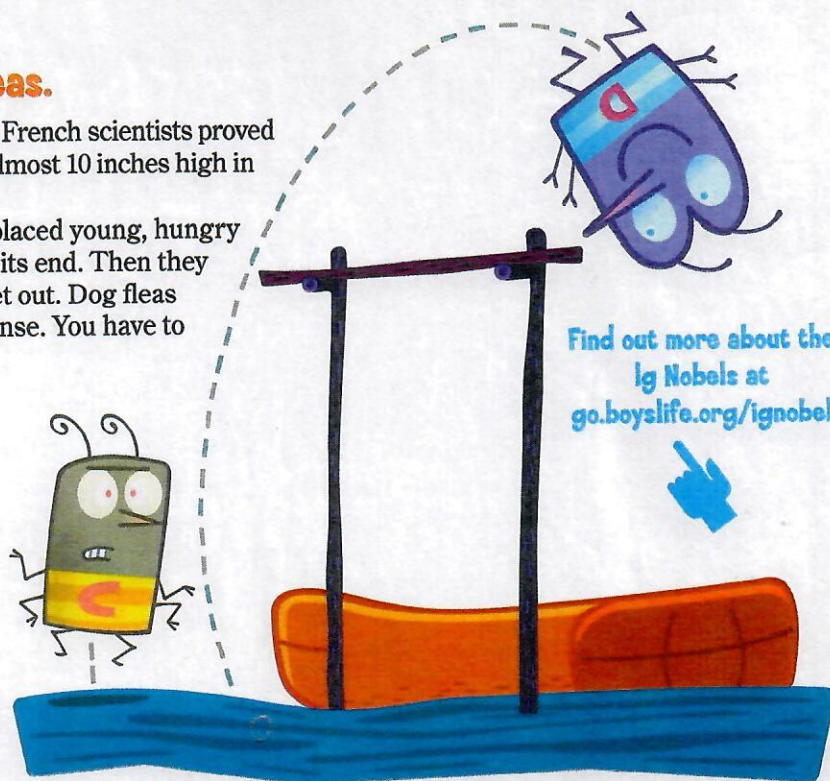
Winner, 2005 Public Health Ig Nobel: Jillian Clark was still in high school when she did her winning research on the five-second rule. She dropped foods on the floor and then studied the bacteria they picked up in five seconds. Her discovery? If the floor is clean, the food is safe to eat. But how clean is *your* floor? You need a powerful electron microscope to know for sure.



Dog fleas jump better than cat fleas.

Did you know dogs and cats have different fleas? French scientists proved dog fleas are the champion jumpers. One jumped almost 10 inches high in this experiment.

Winners, 2008 Biology Ig Nobel: Scientists placed young, hungry fleas at the bottom of a tube that was standing on its end. Then they measured how far those fleas jumped trying to get out. Dog fleas beat cat fleas by an average of 4 inches. Makes sense. You have to jump higher to catch a ride on a big dog.



Find out more about the
Ig Nobels at
go.boyslife.org/ignobel

Why woodpeckers don't get headaches.

Woodpeckers pound their beaks into wood all day long. If you did that, your head would hurt. A lot.

Winner, 2006 Ornithology Ig Nobel: Two University of California scientists found out woodpeckers have soft, spongy skulls, muscular jaws and snugly packed brains, all of which prevent headaches. Some of this research might lead to better headgear for humans.

You can run on water!

What would happen if you tried to run on water? You'd sink. But Italian scientists proved you can do it — if you're on the moon.

Winners, 2013 Physics Ig Nobel: The basilisk lizard can run on water by standing straight up and pushing off the water with its widely spread toes. Why not humans? One word: gravity. So the scientists simulated low gravity by dangling students over a wading pool in a harness. They wore small, hard fins to make their feet act like lizard feet. The result? The students were able to run on water for about 8 seconds before they sank. That's the time it would take to run across a pool — if the pool were on the moon. ✦

