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Bet You Didn't Know: Nine Surprising Facts About Your Body



You live inside it every day. Still, there's probably a lot you don't know about your body's form and function, like ...

1. Your stomach uses caustic acid to digest food.

Gastric juices contain the corrosive substance hydrochloric acid. Mucus protects your stomach lining from acidic damage.

2. Escaping gases cause your joints to crack.

Your hips, shoulders and knees can sound-off in a variety of ways. Sometimes tendons snap or rough surfaces of arthritic joints creak. The common knuckle-cracking sound stems from popping bubbles of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide in your joint's fluids.

3. Bacteria outnumber human cells 10 to 1.

Microbes live in your nose, mouth, skin, digestive system and reproductive organs. Some cause disease. But many others actually benefit your health. Scientists are working hard to understand the best balance and how to maintain it.

4. Your blood vessels measure about 60,000 miles.

Lay arteries and veins end-to-end, and they'll cover a lot of ground. During your lifetime, your heart pumps about 1 million barrels of blood through them at a rate of 1,800 gallons per day.

5. Sweat doesn't smell.

Wonder why your gym bag suggests otherwise? Bacteria feed on fatty acids and other compounds in your perspiration. In the process, they convert the clear fluid into smelly gases.

6. Women blink twice as often as men.

Doctors don't know why, exactly. But in one recent study, female subjects shut their eyes an average of 22 times per minute. That compares with about nine times for men.

7. Your feet are more complex than you think.

Each one contains 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 muscles, tendons and ligaments. Age, ill-fitting shoes and extra weight can put stress on them all, causing such problems as bunions, hammertoe and corns.

8. A chemical called adenosine makes you sleepy.

During the night, your body breaks down this compound. The longer you're awake, the more builds up in your bloodstream. High levels serve as a way to trigger rest when you need it.

9. The spray from sneezes can travel 5 feet.

And it moves quickly — up to 100 miles per hour. It's no wonder Mom always told you to cover your mouth so you wouldn't spread germs.

Your body can do a lot of amazing things; don't forget to take care of it. Start by getting a move on. As you know, regular physical activity can reduce your risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes and bone-weakening osteoporosis. Adults should get at least two and a half hours (150 minutes) each week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity; keep your intervals at 10 minutes at a time or more. Adults should aim for strength activities, like push-ups, sit-ups and lifting weights, at least two days a week.