

# Hiccups and a Pig

#WellnessWednesday

We have all experienced at some time in our lives that uncomfortable jerking of our upper body accompanied by the inevitable sound, the hiccup.

Hiccups are caused by a sudden, violent and involuntary contraction of the diaphragm muscles. When these muscle contract the opening between the vocal cords in the throat closes quickly making the hiccup sound.

According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, the longest time a person hiccuped was for 68 years. Yes, you read that right. For 68 years this unfortunate person had that repetitive and involuntary diaphragmatic contraction and you are not going to believe what caused it.

This distinction belonged to a Mr. Charles Osborne of Anthon, Iowa. Mr. Osborne was born in 1894 and at the age of 28 the story is that while attempting to lift and weigh a 350 pound hog before slaughtering it, he began to hiccup.

Records indicate that the cause was due to a small pin size hemorrhage in his brain. Yes, he had a stroke lifting the enormous pig to weigh it. During the first few decades, it is documented that Mr. Osborn hiccuped up to 40 times a minute. Miraculously in February of 1990, a year before his death at the age of 97, the hiccuping stopped. Maybe he became a vegetarian around that time. I don't know. But it stopped.

## Causes and Treatments

The most common cause of hiccups seems to be eating too fast. Other causes include chewing gum, kidney failure, damage to the vagus nerve, liver problems causing damage or irritation of the diaphragm.

There are also more than 60 commonly prescribed medications that can cause, as a side effect, a hiccup. These meds include Xanax, Ativan, Zofran, some antibiotics, steroids and opioid medications.



*Avoid hiccups: eat slowly, relax, maybe, become a vegetarian. Okay, we're not so sure about the vegetarian part.*

There are a number of home remedies that have been suggested to terminate hiccups. Having someone frighten you sure does not seem to work and may have certain risks involved. Yes, I've tried it on my wife. It doesn't work and sometimes you get a "reflex" punch in the shoulder for doing it.

"Was that a reflex?" I asked. She assured me it was, but I digress.

Some suggest biting on a lemon or taking a spoon full of sugar, you know, to "help the medicine go down," but I have found that these methods do not help much with the hiccups. A suggestion that I am still trying to figure out is drinking from the far side of a glass. Think about this before you try it.

The most successful non medicinal remedy for me and my patients includes a method that causes the body to retain carbon dioxide. Just hold your breath as long as you can while slowly drinking a glass of water then slowly exhale. You may have to repeat this once or twice. This is believed to facilitate relaxation of the diaphragm and stop the spasm causing the hiccups.

In the future, to prevent this violent diaphragmatic contraction, just eat

slowly and enjoy your meal and of course, become a vegetarian—you know, because of that whole pig part.