

A hiccup is an involuntary spasmodic contraction of the muscle at the base of the lungs (diaphragm) followed by the rapid closure of the vocal cords. Usually, hiccups last for a few hours or, occasionally, a day or two. However, chronic hiccups are ones that continue for an extended period of time. Episodes that last for more than two days and less than a month are sometimes called persistent hiccups. On rare occasions, hiccups persist even longer than a month or recur frequently over an extended period of time. The longest recorded episode of these chronic hiccups lasted 60 years. Hiccups are unmistakable, and rarely taken for anything else. They often start for no apparent reason, and usually go away on their own in a few minutes. Of concern is the period of time required for an episode to run its course. Hiccups that persist over a period of time may cause exhaustion and weight loss from lack of sleep and the interruption of normal eating patterns. Hiccups affect males more often than females. Hiccups occur in practically every human being, but chronic hiccups are very rare. There are many disorders involving the autonomic nervous system which controls unconscious activities of the body such as breathing, sweating, heartbeat, hiccups, coughing, etc. The diagnosis of chronic hiccups may be obvious, but blood, imaging, and other laboratory studies may be used to determine the underlying cause.