



Why Do Hiccups Happen and How Can We Stop Them?

Discussion > Advanced 7



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

irritate	To cause pain or discomfort in a part of the body.
[verb]	<i>Ex: I think the sun cream is irritating my skin.</i>

spasm	A sudden contraction of a muscle.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Ever since I tried lifting that sofa on my own I've been having back spasms.</i>

voice box	The part of the throat that contains the vocal cords and forms an air passage.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Every year about 13,000 Americans are diagnosed with laryngeal cancer, or cancer of the voice box.</i>



vocal cords	Thin folds of tissue inside the throat used for making sounds.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Let's warm up those vocal cords with some humming.</i>

fizzy	Having bubbles due to being carbonated (of a drink).
[adjective]	<i>Ex: I have a sore throat, so I'm trying to avoid fizzy drinks.</i>

granulated	In the form of grains or very small pieces.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: Melt the granulated sugar and cook until it takes on a golden-brown color.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

Why Do Hiccups Happen and How Can We Stop Them?

Most of us have been hic, hic, hiccupping since before we were born. Hiccups are the loud noises our throats make without us wanting them to — and they can be funny or embarrassing depending on where we are.

But why do we hiccup, and how can we stop them?

According to WebMD, hiccups start in our diaphragm — which is the muscle between our lungs and stomach that helps us to breathe.

When we breathe in, our diaphragm pulls down to let air into our lungs. It then relaxes when we breathe out again.

But if something irritates our diaphragm, it can cause it to spasm. The spasm makes us inhale air suddenly. When this air hits our voice box, our vocal cords immediately shut, creating a "hic" sound.



Some of the reasons we hiccup include eating too quickly or too much. Swallowing air while sucking on candy — or drinking fizzy drinks like Coca-Cola, or too much alcohol — can also cause us to hiccup.

Emotions — like being nervous, excited, or even stressed — cause hiccups too.

But how can we get rid of them?

You probably have friends who have tried to scare your hiccups away, especially as a kid. Some people also believe drinking out of the wrong side of a glass can work — or holding your breath and slowly counting to 10.

The official recommendations from the UK's National Health Service (NHS) say that holding your breath for a short time is a good idea. Breathing into a paper bag is another option the NHS gives, as well as pulling your knees up to your chest and leaning forward, or very slowly drinking ice-cold water.

Stranger suggestions from the NHS include swallowing granulated sugar, biting on a lemon, or tasting vinegar.

However, if your hiccups still haven't gone away after two days, or they're so strong they get in the way of breathing, eating, or sleeping comfortably, WebMD says you'll need to contact a doctor.



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. How do you usually try to cure the hiccups?
2. Have you heard of any unusual ways to get rid of hiccups?
3. Do you find it surprising that some emotions can cause hiccups?
4. Where do you get most of your advice about health?
5. Do you ever google your symptoms when you're feeling unwell?
6. What do you think people 50 years from now will think of today's medicine?
7. In your opinion, what are the most important medical discoveries or inventions of all time?
8. Do you know anyone who works in medicine or healthcare?