The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don’t know which ones.

Special Section: Medical Surprises

4 Spaghetti Surprise*
7 Surprises About Patients*
10 Surprises About Surgeons*
13 Surprises for Medical Students*
16 Surprising Medical Techniques*
20 The Paper Clip in Medicine*
22 Medical Nitroglycerine Explosions*
24 Icky Cutesy: Weighting, Self-Circumcision*
25 May We Recommend: After the Deluge, Shocked in Bed*
26 Ig® and Beyond: How Surgeons Behave Like Monkeys and Apes*

Improbable Research Reviews*

3 Improbable Research: Dead Trout Swimming, Balloon Bursting*

News & Notes

2 AIR Vents (letters from our readers): Touching Seen in Airports
27 Ig® Nobel Limericks: Grizzly Armor, Country Music*
28 Editorial Board
28 Index of Special Issues

IBC Teachers’ Guide
IBC Unclassified Ads

Where There’s More
There’s always new improbable — it’s not what you expect! — stuff on the Improbable Research blog at IMPROBABLE.COM

On the Front Cover

On the Back Cover
A isopropyl alcohol bottle’s label implies the existence of many curious histories: “Do not point at self or others; product will squirt when squeezed.” Photo: A.S. Kaswell.

Some Coming Events

See IMPROBABLE.COM for details of these and other events:

Many Dates
Improbable Research Table Talks
(see web site)

September 13, 2018
Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony, Harvard U

September 15, 2018
Ig Informal Lectures, MIT

September 21–November 4, 2018
Ig Nobel Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan

October 3, 2018
Orlando, FL, USA

October 4, 2018
Harvard University

October 10, 2018
Hartford, CT, USA

November 23, 2018
Annual “Science Friday” radio broadcast

February 16, 2019
AAAS, Washington, DC

March/April 2019
Ig Nobel EuroTour
Consequences of a Wedgie for a 50-Year-Old Man

“Wedgie-Associated Radiculitis in a Quinquagenarian,” Courtney E. Sutherland, Toban Dvoretzky, and Nicholas J. Solomos, Proceedings (Baylor University Medical Center), vol. 29, no. 4, 2016, pp. 389-390.

Wedgies—the upward yanking of another’s underpants from the rear to wedge them between the buttocks—can be administered playfully, maliciously, or adventurously; at forces ranging from gentle to “atomic”; and with or without the foreknowledge or consent of the recipient. Wedgies have been documented anecdotally in the popular Internet literature, with chief emphasis on their sensation-seeking or momentary entertainment value to the giver and recipient. Most participants are typically young; however, we report the case of a 50-year-old man who sustained chronic, painless radiculitis after he received an unanticipated wedgie of moderate force.

He Ate It, She Vomited

“Anaphylaxis Secondary to Contact with a Vomited Food Allergen,” Leah R. Chernin, David A. Swender, Robert W. Hostoffer, and Haig Tcheurekdjian, Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, vol. 109, no. 4, 2012, p. 279. (Thank to Brenda Goodman for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University Hospitals Richmond Medical Center, Ohio; Allergy/Immunology Associates, Inc.; and Case Western Reserve University report:

We describe a case of anaphylaxis secondary to contact with a food allergen in another child’s emesis....

At 13 months of age the patient’s brother ate macaroni and cheese and corn bread for dinner. Four hours later the patient and her brother were lying in bed together, and he vomited on her. The emesis came in contact with the patient’s eyes, nose and mouth. Within 10 minutes she developed urticarial lesions surrounding the right eye, bilateral eyelid edema, and tearing of the eyes. The patient’s mother gave her a bath and noticed labored breathing within 20 minutes of the child coming in contact with the emesis.... To our knowledge this is the first report of anaphylaxis secondary to contact with a food allergen in another child’s emesis.
SURPRISES ABOUT PATIENTS [CONTINUED]

Bourdonnement and Other Benign Temporary Breast Implant Sounds

Richard Dowden, MD

Sounds may be heard from the breast implant pocket, including buzzing, popping, clicking, or sloshing noises. These sounds are commonly referred to as bourdonnement, a term described as a buzzing or hum. Bourdonnement is often caused by air from the developing pocket out into the surrounding tissues. It is a painless crackling sensation, mostly felt by palpation, but it can also be heard under quiet conditions. For some reason, patients may imagine that this signifies leaking of the implant. Crepitation can be minimized by using a small vacuum to remove air from the pocket. Patients are understandable alarmed by these sounds emanating from their breasts, and it is helpful for the surgeon to be able to discuss them, and to reassure the patient of the lack of any long-term significance of the phenomenon. This report includes intraoperative techniques by which some of the sounds can be avoided or minimized.

Patients Are Alarmed by Their Buzzing, Squeaking Breasts

“Bourdonnement and Other Benign Temporary Breast Implant Sounds,” Richard Dowden, Annals of Plastic Surgery, vol. 43, no. 6, December 1999, pp. 589-591. (Thanks to John Bell for bringing this to our attention.) The author, at Case Western Reserve University, explains that:

During the early postoperative period, a variety of sounds may be detected emanating from the augmented breast. These sounds are nearly always benign and are temporary. The sounds can be described as crepitation, popping, sloshing, squeaking, buzzing, and humming, and a new term, “bourdonnement,” is applied to one of these phenomena. Patients are understandably alarmed by sounds emanating from their breasts, and it is helpful for the surgeon to be able to discuss them, and to reassure the patient of the lack of any long-term significance of the phenomena. This report includes intraoperative techniques by which some of the sounds can be avoided or minimized.

Medically Induced Creation of a Poet

“Compulsive Versifying After Treatment of Transient Epileptic Amnesia,” Ione O.C. Woollacott, Phillip D. Fletcher, Luke A. Massey, Amirtha Pasupathy, Martin N. Rossor, Diana Caine, Jonathan D. Rohrer, and Jason D. Warren, Neurocase, vol. 21, no. 5, 2015, pp. 548-553. (Thanks to Ivan Oransky for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at University College London, the Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, and the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, London, UK, report:

We present a patient with transient epileptic amnesia and a left temporal seizure focus, who developed isolated compulsive versifying, producing multiple rhyming poems, following seizure cessation induced by lamotrigine. We include one of her rhymes as an example of her new ability to write: (B) My poems come, They have no homes Year; eh, yours. And never more. When? Why do you put pen to page? Benefic, share them with me. Prose - no, thats a different matter. Rather more than just a maker. Prose is earned, prose is useless Poor is lovely and impressive From tells you, and clear, these Life - life is dear.

Richard Dowden, lead author of the study “Bourdonnement and Other Benign Temporary Breast Implant Sounds.” Drawing by Nan Swift, Improbable Research staff.
50 Sessions With the Man Who Was and Was Not Freddy Mercury


A case report is presented and analyzed of a patient who was a double for and imitator of the late Freddy Mercury, lead singer for the rock group Queen.... Although impressive Freddy Mercury imago appeared to benefit the patient, mainly though social acceptance and enhanced opportunities for relationships, in the long term it could not cover up his deep-rooted and repressed identity problems. The struggle to cope with these problems is illustrated here....

Mister B., 36 years of age, contacted me because he suffered from the consequences of severe identity confusion. He had been living and working as a double and imitator of Freddy Mercury, a deceased rock singer. Mr. B. had become increasingly aware that he would never be Freddy Mercury, but also he had difficulties in accepting and showing his real self. Mister B. had done something that put him in a situation that was irreversible: He had cosmetic surgery to become a convincing look-alike and imitator of the star....

Mister B. doubted if he could endure a long-lasting and intensive therapeutic process because he was afraid that he was too fragile for it. We agreed on a limited series of 50 one-hour sessions.

A promotional poster for a recording of a concert by Freddie Mercury and his band, Queen.