



# Studies to make you laugh, then think

Es geht doch nichts über eine fundierte Studie, denken einige Wissenschaftler. Manche von ihnen erhalten einen Preis für Forschungsergebnisse der ganz besonderen Art.

medium US

**H**ave you noticed how many new studies are out there? So many of them are useless. For example, is it really helpful to find out who is more likely to sleep with a stranger — men or women? I also have to wonder how much money was spent on the studies that showed that kids who eat junk food are likely to have weight problems. Did we really need a study to know what the results would be?

The people at a science humor magazine called *Annals of Improbable Research* like this sort of thing. They've discovered that a large number of studies exist that "make people laugh, and then think." Since it's unlikely

that any of the scientists they report on will ever win a Nobel Prize, the magazine gives its own awards each year: the Ig Nobel Prizes.

In 2008, for example, scientists in New England won an Ig Nobel Prize in Chemistry for discovering that Coca-Cola can be an effective spermicide. Before you rush off to test this theory, you should know that scientists in Taipei won an Ig Nobel Prize for discovering that Coca-Cola is not an effective spermicide. Perhaps we should study which study is correct.

Another scientist, this time one in Britain, found that when foods sound better — like potato chips that make a loud crunch when eaten — people think they taste better, too. The strangest part of this study is that the chips tested didn't actually make a louder sound. People in the study simply listened to computer-modified sounds of crunching while eating the chips. The scientist and his Italian colleague are the proud winners of the 2008 Ig Nobel Prize in Nutrition.

Scientists in San Diego won last year's Ig Nobel Prize in Physics for demonstrating mathematically that string, hair, and other similar materials will, at some point, tangle themselves into knots. The title of their paper was "Spontaneous Knotting of an Agitated String." I know a lot about getting knots out of kids' shoelaces and other stringy things, and I'd say it's more likely that the person trying to untangle those knots is the agitated one. My suggestion for a title would be "Spontaneous Meltdown of an Agitated String Detangler."

It was an international team of scientists who won the latest Ig Nobel Prize in Medicine for showing that people who thought they were taking expensive placebos were more likely to find them effective than people who thought their placebos were inexpensive. Here's some solid advice for all those placebo-makers out there: raise your prices!

Studies on the effects of sword swallowing and on how sheets become wrinkled were winners in past years, along with a very serious report that shows that rats sometimes cannot tell the difference between a person speaking Japanese backwards and a person speaking Dutch backwards. I'm comforted to know that this is only sometimes the case.

I have done some studies of my own. For example, I believe I can show without a doubt that wives who have husbands who snore tend to sleep less deeply than women whose husbands do not; or that people who drink great amounts of alcohol before driving their cars tend to have more accidents. My next study is going to be really revolutionary: I'll look at whether the people who've read this article have benefited from knowing the results of all these studies. ●



**"Taking expensive placebos is better than taking inexpensive ones"**

<b>agitated</b> [ˈædʒɪteɪtɪd]	bewegt
<b>crunch</b> [krʌntʃ]	Knirschen, Knuspergeräusch
<b>detangler</b> [diːˈtæŋɡlə]	Entwirrer(in)
<b>Ig Nobel Prize (Ignoble)</b> [ɪg ˌnəʊbəl ˈpraɪz]	Ig Nobelpreis
<b>(Ignoble)</b> [ɪg ˌnəʊbəl]	unwürdig
<b>knot</b> [nɒt]	Knoten
<b>meltdown</b> [ˈmeltðaʊn]	Zusammenbruch
<b>nutrition</b> [nuˈtriʃən]	Ernährung
<b>shoelace</b> [ˈʃuːleɪs]	Schnürsenkel
<b>snore</b> [snɔːr]	schnarchen
<b>stringy</b> [ˈstriŋi]	fadenartig
<b>sword swallowing</b> [ˈsɔːrd ˌswɑːləʊn]	Schwert schlucken
<b>tangle oneself</b> [ˈtæŋɡl wʌnˌself]	sich verwickeln
<b>untangle sth.</b> [ˌʌnˈtæŋɡl]	etw. entwirren
<b>wrinkled</b> [ˈrɪŋkəld]	zerknittert