



Your Amazing Body

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"Aa Aa ACHOO!!!"

The title of this article probably had you thinking "Bless You!" Or maybe "Gesundheit!" Whatever you say, common sneeze etiquette all around the world teaches that we say something when somebody else sneezes. Different people say different things but the sentiment is always the same and that is a wish of wellness or health to the person who has sneezed.

It's kind of funny that we wish each other well when we sneeze because the act of sneezing itself is a clear demonstration of how smart your body is and that, at least in this regard, it is working perfectly! Now you might say, "Hold on a minute! I only sneeze when I'm sick!" But let's look a little closer at the sneeze and see if I can't change your mind.

The big word for the act of sneezing is *sternutation* (pronounced STERN-YA-TA-TION). So if you want to sound super smart in front of your friends, the next time someone sneezes you can say, "Was that a sternutation?" or "Did someone sternutate?" (Of course, then you can follow-up with "Gesundheit!") Whatever you call it though, the reason we sneeze is simply to remove an irritant from the nose.

Sometimes a particle or cluster of particles, such as dust or pepper, can get past your nose hairs which typically serve as an amazing protective barrier. When things do get past the hair barrier, they might make it to the back of your nose where you have special tissue called the nasal mucosa. This tissue is special in several ways, but in this case it makes the mucus which will become the vehicle by which the particles will exit your body.

The mucosa also triggers the production of a special chemical, called histamine, which triggers the nerve cells in your nose to send signals to your brain where the complicated act of sneezing gets organized and sent back to your body. Think about it... you use a lot



of muscles to sneeze! You use your stomach muscles, your chest muscles, the muscles under your lungs (called your diaphragm), your throat muscles and even your eyelids. (You always close your eyes when you sneeze!)

Whatever it is that's up your nose tickling you, it is estimated that it is expelled from the body at over 100 mph when you sneeze which seems like a brilliant way to get it far away from you. This is also why your parents are always telling you to block your mouth when you sneeze and preferably with your elbow, not your hand. Your sneeze can spray germs and irritants up to 30 feet away from you!!! Of course, not only does using your elbow block more than your hand, but you won't be carrying all the stuff you just sneezed out around on your hand.

The amazing thing is that, no matter why you are sneezing, your body is so smart that it not only has a system to recognize the problem, it also has a system to fix it and get rid of it. Of course, it's using your nerve system to communicate between your brain and your body so it makes sense to keep your nerve system working in tip top shape. Your family chiropractor can help you with that.

- Judy Campanale, DC, ACP, FCSC (hon)

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