Podcast: Imagine This

Episode: Why do we get the hiccups?

Duration: 8’24

[ABC Podcast sting - This is an ABC Podcast]

[Pleasant classical strings]

Bri: Hello. I'm Bri. And today on Imagine This, we're going to talk about

[Bri hiccups].

Um, and today on Imagine This, we're going to talk about

[Bri hiccups]

Excuse me... Emma?

Emma: Hi.

Bri: Could you help me out for a minute here?

[Bri hiccups]

Emma: Absolutely.

[Bri hiccups]

Bri: I'm finding it very hard to breathe.

[Bri hiccups]

Emma: Bri, I think you've got the hiccups.

Bri: Oh no, the hiccups?

[Bri hiccups]

Emma: Relax. It's going to be okay.

Bri: Okay. I'm going to relax. Breathe in and out.

Emma: Is that any better Brianna?

Bri: Yeah, I think they're gone.

[Bri hiccups]

If you hadn't already guessed, today on Imagine This, we're talking about the hiccups. And our question comes from five-year-old Leida and three-year-old Femi.

Leida and Femi: Why do we get the hiccups?

Bri: Hmm. Well, luckily our friend Emma Beckett is with us today.

Emma: Hello.

Kids: Hello.

Hello!

[Kids giggle]

Bri: Emma is a food scientist from the University of Newcastle, and she's going to help us hunt down these hiccups. Emma, do you ever get the hiccups?

Emma: Uh-huh

Bri: What about you? Have you ever had the hiccups?

Kids: Yeah.

I sometimes have hiccups.

I sometimes have hiccups.

Me too!

Bri: So what does a hiccup sound like?

[Playful classical music]

Kids: Um, I go...

[Kids mimic hiccups]

Hick! Once you do a hiccup, you do another one. Hick! Hick!

Bri: Where do you feel the hiccup in your body?

Kids: I feel them in my mouth.

In my tummy.

It feels like you're coughing up, like in your neck.

Sneezing a little bit.

Emma: A hiccup kind of does feel like a cough, or a sneeze, or a burp maybe?

Kids: No!

No. I think just like...

Burps go uh. And hiccups go huh!

Bri: Does a hiccup go in or out?

Kids: In.

Out!

I think it's in.

Yeah I think it goes in.

Bri: Yep. Burps go out and hiccups go in.

Kids: Is that a real burp or a pretend?

Bri: Uh, I think that was a real burp.

Kids: Even if you do a burp, you still need to say, "Excuse me."

Because it's a bit rude.

Yeah.

[Emma laughs]

Bri: Oh, excuse me. Right, Emma?

Emma: Yep.

Bri: It feels like hiccups come from lots different places in the body. So where do they actually come from?

Emma: So underneath your lungs, you have a big sheet of muscle that your lungs use to help you breathe.

Kids: Breathe in. Breathe out..

Emma: Usually, this muscle tightens and relaxes, and tightens and relaxes to help you breathe in and out, and in and out, like a rhythm.

[Playful tuba]

Kids: Tighten. Relax.

Tighten. And relax.

Tighten. And relax.

Emma: But every now and then, that muscle goes a little bit funny, and it twitches really quickly.

Kids: Twitch!

Emma: And when it twitches, it makes you breathe in.

Kids: Huh!

Huh!

Emma: Just a little bit.

Kids: Twitch! Twitch! Twitch! Twitch!

[Frantic sting music]

Emma: And that's your muscle just twitching

[hiccup]

Twitching

[hiccup]

Twitching

[hiccup]

And that's a hiccup.

Kids: Twitch!

Bri: So what makes that muscle twitch?

Emma: Sometimes people get hiccups after they drink too much fizzy drink.

Kids: It means like bubbles in the drink.

Fizzy water?

Emma: Yeah. Fizzy water with bubbles in it.

Kids: I don't like fizzy water.

Emma: Or sometimes people might get hiccups if they eat too fast

[Fast eating, hiccupping].

Excuse me.

Kids: I think sometimes when you hurt yourself you get the hiccups.

Ouch!

Emma: Yeah. Sometimes people get hiccups if they have a fright

[hiccup]

Emma: Sometimes if you're running around and having lots of fun, you can accidentally give yourself hiccups.

Kids: If we so quickly. Hick!

Bri: Okay. So we know what a hiccup is, and we know some of the ways we can get them. But why does our body do that? Why do we need a hiccup?

[Curious, sparse classical music]

Emma: So, all of those things can cause hiccups, but scientists don't really know the real reason why we get them. But we think that we all start out life with one first hiccup, and that's to help us take our first big breath of air.

Bri: Wow. So that first big breath of air that we take in when we're babies our first breath in the world, could have been a hiccup?

Emma: Yes.

Bri: So now that we get them when we're older, and we don't really want them all the time, how do we make them go away?

Kids: I think if you, I don't know.

The only way to get rid of hiccups is half a glass of water.

If you drink a lot of more water than it will stop.

No, you don't have to drink lots more water. You can just drink a glass of water. And just take one day and then the hiccups are gone.

Bri: Is that how you get rid of the hiccups, Emma?

Emma: There are lots of ways people try and get rid of the hiccups, but scientists still don't know which ones really work.

Bri: Hmm. Well, how come every time I drink a glass of water, my hiccups disappear?

Emma: Some of the things that we think are cures probably are just distracting you while you wait for the hiccups to go away on their own.

Bri: I think I'll have a glass of water, anyway. I like a good distraction.

Kids: Yes.

Yes.

Bri: Sometimes when I get the hiccups, it feels like I'm going to have them forever, but no one's had the hiccups forever, have they?

Emma: Uh-uh. The world record for the longest hiccups is over 60 years.

Bri: Oh, no. I'm not going to get the hiccups for 60 years, am I?

Emma: I don't think so, Bri. Maybe most of the time, hiccups will go away on their own very quickly.

Kids: Yeah.

They go away.

Emma: Phew. And relax.

[Pleasant classical music]

Kids: Relax.

Bri: So to answer your question, Femi and Leida, a hiccup is when the muscle that helps you breathe, twitches.

Kids: Twitch!

Emma: And makes you suck in a quick breath of air. Sometimes we get the hiccups. When we eat too fast, or drink too much fizzy drink, or have a fright. But when we're looking for reason about why the hiccups happen to us, well, the body does things that we don't always understand. But the closest thing that scientists can think of is that it could have been a hiccup that helped us take our very first breath in the world to help us get going, so we can keep breathing for the rest of our lives.

Bri: Imagine This is produced by me, Brianna Peterson, and is a co-production between ABC Kids Listen and The Conversation. Additional sound and mastering for this episode by Russell Stapleton. To hear more episodes of Imagine This, plus a range of music and stories for young children, download the ABC Kids Listen app.