

Bizarre Medical And Science News of the Week



By Josh Bloom — January 17, 2020

Rarely does a week go by without some rather strange stories emerging about science and medicine. This past week was no exception.

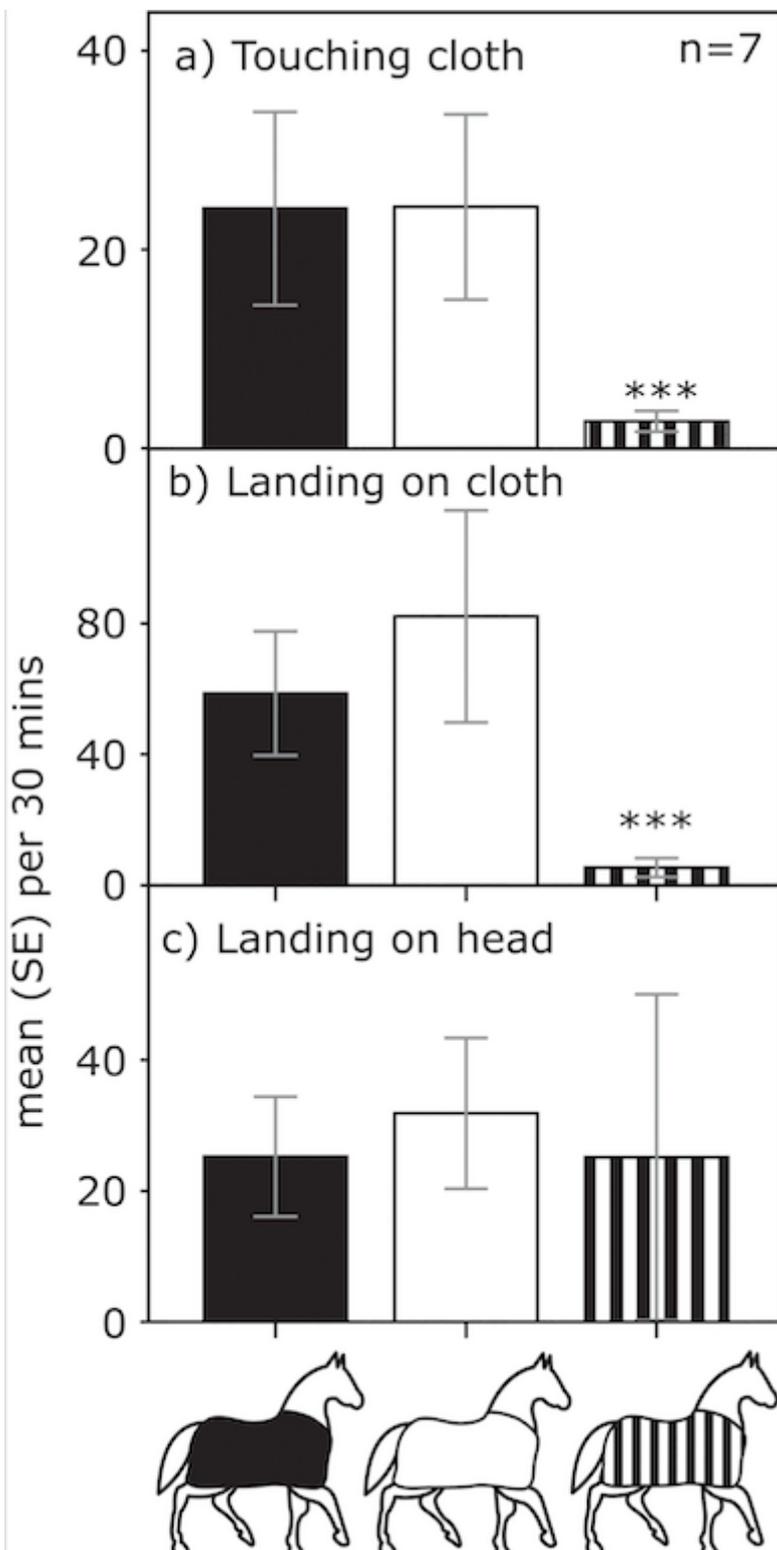


Something a bit different. Rather than blather on about this and that, putting half of you into a coma here are a few especially unusual stories that I came across in the past week.

1. A Horse of a Different Color

Just when you think you've heard it all...

A group of scientists from UC Davis [put stripes](#) ^[1] on horses, hoping to reduce insect bites and, consequently, the use of insecticides. While this may seem odd – in "Benefits of zebra stripes: Behaviour of tabanid flies around zebras and horses" – Tim Caro and colleagues maintain that zebra stripes evolved as a mechanism to prevent flies from biting the animals. Did it work? You tell me.



"Mean (and SE) number of tabanid flies (a) touching or (b) landing on cloth coats of different shade and pattern, and (c) landing on the bare head of 7 different horses. *** = $p < 0.0001$."

The authors looked at a bunch of parameters. Here's one: Three different patterned coats were put on 7 horses and the number of flies landing on the heads of the horses was compared to the number landing on the coats. Coats? I'm not sure this is a fair comparison...



2. Marijuana can make you VERY sick.

This one is not funny. Not one bit.

As marijuana becomes more acceptable and more people use it, it's a sure bet – just like with any drug, prescription or otherwise – that more side effects and adverse reactions are going to be revealed. Here's one you can probably do without: Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (CHS).

[Medical News Today](#) ^[2] reported the story of a 17-year-old boy who ended up in the ER in seriously bad shape.

Brian had been living with his father at the time, and he called me because he had been vomiting for 3 days. When I went to pick him up to take him to the ER, we had to stop about five times on the way so that he could vomit.

This was the least of his problems. His kidneys were shutting down because of dehydration and he was having seizures. One very sharp ER doc asked if he smoked marijuana. He did. She immediately diagnosed CHS, which was later confirmed by a gastroenterologist. The seizures were from extreme anxiety. IV fluids and antiemetic drugs helped him recover.

Then this.

Brian began using marijuana again, and for several weeks, he did not have any symptoms at all.

In October 2018, Brian began vomiting again, and I decided to take him to the ER. I told the doctors about the CHS diagnosis, and tests revealed that his kidneys were shutting down once more.

He kept smoking, kept vomiting, and lost 40 pounds in a couple of months. He was not so lucky this time. After smoking one night he began vomiting and complained of severe kidney pain. Then he stopped breathing. The next trip to the ER would be his last. Brian died; the autopsy revealed that his death was caused by dehydration.

It is counterintuitive that marijuana, which helps prevent nausea and vomiting, would cause it. But it's real. A [2018 paper](#) [3] estimated that almost 3 million people in the US suffer from CHS.

3. A racist amino acid.

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is simply the sodium salt of glutamic acid - one of the 20 amino acids that make up human protein. But 50 years ago people decided that MSG was responsible for a host of undesirable health effects - a myth that still persists today even though it has been [thoroughly debunked](#) [4]. Merriam-Webster Dictionary even has a name for the non-symptoms caused by MSG:

***Chinese restaurant syndrome:** a group of symptoms (such as numbness of the neck, arms, and back with headache, dizziness, and palpitations) that is held to affect susceptible persons eating food and especially Chinese food heavily seasoned with monosodium glutamate.*

Needless to say, a number of Asians [find this term to be offensive](#) [5] and a group of activists have launched a campaign called "[Redefine CRS.](#)" [6] Not surprisingly, Twitter is playing an important part in the anti-CRS movement.



mfmfmf
@fmb6ny



Hey [@MerriamWebster](#), maybe it's time to [#RedefineCRS](#). Your definition of Chinese Restaurant Syndrome is seriously outdated. Here's why: [redefineCRS.com](#).

Not to be outdone, others are working on different amino-acid-based PR campaigns:

I Love Leucine - A TV Revival

Tripping with Tryptophan - A Natural High

Prolines and Cream! Build Muscle While Pigging Out

4. A woman can play two recorders at once. Using her nose. One in each nostril.

Here - see for yourself:

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1216677748350914561> [7]

Having mastered this she's now working on the trombone. It's not going well.

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Links

[1] <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0210831>

[2] <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/326357.php#2>

[3] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/bcpt.12962>

[4] <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/pressroom/newsreleases/2014/august/is-msg-bad-for-you-debunking-a-long-running-food-myth-video.html>

[5] <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/18/asia/chinese-restaurant-syndrome-msg-intl-hnk-scli/index.html>

[6] <https://www.whyusemsg.com/chinese-restaurant-syndrome/>

[7] <https://twitter.com/i/status/1216677748350914561>