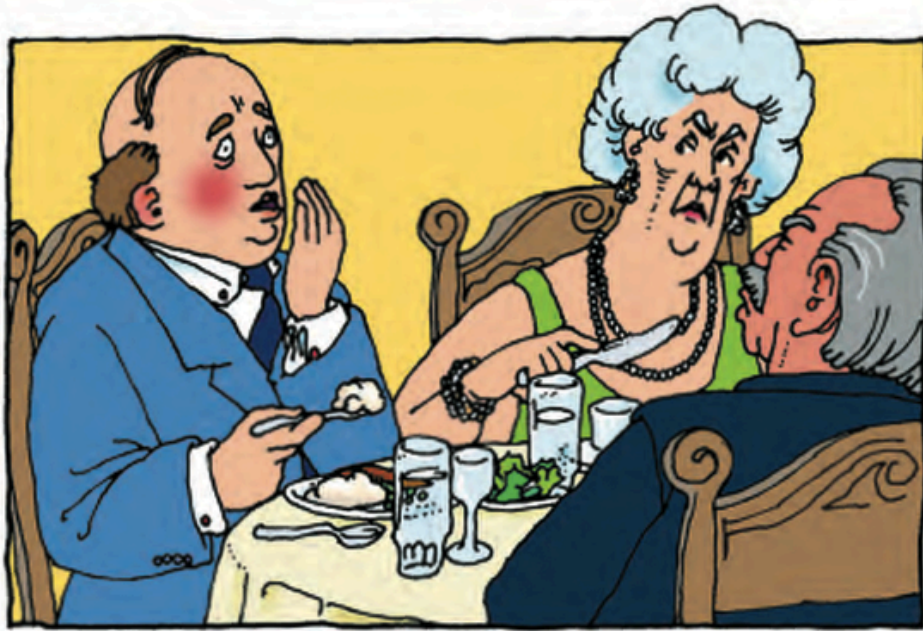


## EXCUSE ME, PLEASE!



Sometimes you can't help it. You do something that your parents and teachers have told you isn't polite. You burp. Or you get the hiccups. Embarrassing! What causes burps and hiccups? Let's take a look.

### **Burps: Doing Away With Extra Air**

A burp is your body's way of getting rid of swallowed air. That air gets into your stomach by way of the esophagus, just as food does. But food is supposed to be in the stomach; air belongs in the lungs, right?

If you "swallow" too much air while you're eating, you'll start to feel uncomfortable. It's especially likely to happen if you're eating fast.

Once you've swallowed too much air, you'll get an unpleasant sense of fullness that is caused by the pressure of the air. Burping gets rid of the extra air and relieves the uncomfortable feeling. When you drink a soda, you swallow carbon dioxide bubbles. That can lead to burping. Or maybe you've "burped" your baby brother or sister. Burping babies is necessary because they swallow air when they are being fed. If they get too much gas, their stomachs expand. That hurts, and the baby usually starts to cry. By placing your baby sister on your shoulder and patting her gently on the back, you can help the air come back up.

Although burping is frowned on in our society, it's a compliment to the host in some other cultures. It's kind of like saying, "Thank you for an excellent meal. I enjoyed it!"



## Hiccups: Things Get Out of Synch

Hiccups can be worse than burps. Once you get them, you think they'll never end!

Hiccups are a sign that your breathing is out of synch. To understand why hiccups happen, you have to know something about how the respiratory system works.

Respiration involves two main types of muscles—the rib, or intercostal, muscles and the diaphragm, which lies at the base of your lungs.

Normally, these two muscle groups work together like a well-synchronized machine. When you inhale, the intercostal muscles contract, and your rib cage moves up and out. The diaphragm moves down and flattens. This makes room for air in your lungs. A moment later, when you exhale, the diaphragm and intercostal muscles relax, forcing air out of the lungs.

Hiccups happen when the diaphragm contracts and pushes down at the wrong time, forcing air to move quickly past the vocal cords. Your brain says, "Wait a minute!" It sends a message to the tongue and the back of your throat to stop that air.

When air is forced across the vocal cords in the back of your mouth, the cords snap shut. You make a funny sound, called a hiccup.

People try many things to stop the hiccups. Some people eat a spoonful of sugar. Some breathe into a bag. Others believe the cure is to hold their breath and drink water.

The best thing to do is just to relax and try to breathe regularly. Soon things will get back in synch and the "hic-hic-hic" will stop.

