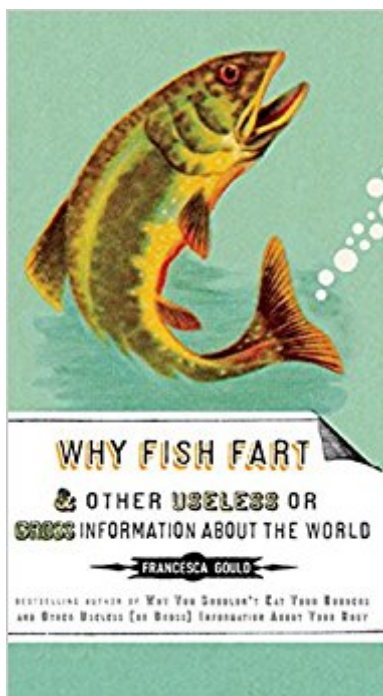


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Why Fish Fart And Other Useless Or Gross Information About The World



Synopsis

From the author of the New York Times bestseller* *Why You Shouldn't Eat Your Boogers and Other Useless (or Gross) Information About Your Body*: the be-all and end-all compendium of odd, quirky, and otherwise nauseating information. Here is another thoroughly distasteful yet utterly compelling book from the author of the New York Times (extended list) bestseller *Why You Shouldn't Eat Your Boogers and Other Useless (or Gross) Information About Your Body*. In *Why Fish Fart and Other Useless (or Gross) Information About the World*, Francesca Gould sifts through the world's most unpleasant creatures, diseases, physical deformities, culinary delicacies, ritual practices, and hideous torture tactics to uncover every horrifying and stomach-turning fact under the sun. This book is full of questions you never thought to ask—and perhaps will wish you'd never had answered—including: What exactly is maggot cheese? How did anal hair help to lead to the conviction of the Great Train Robbers? What is the job of a fart catcher? How exactly do crabs cause such intense itching around one's private parts? The real story behind why the toilet is often referred to as 'the john.' Why you might want to steer clear of some coffees. (Hint: If poo isn't exactly your idea of appetizing . . .) *Why Fish Fart and Other Useless (or Gross) Information About the World* is sure to delight any and all hard-core fans of the obscure, esoteric, and last but not least—grotesque.

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Customer Reviews

Francesca Gould is the author of the New York Times (extended list) bestseller *Why You Shouldn't Eat Your Boogers and Other Useless (or Gross) Information about Your Body*

and Why Fish Fart and Other Useless or Gross Information about the World. She lives in Bristol, England.

Chapter One – •Obscene CuisineWhat is

•Dancing-eating?•Dancing-eating• or, to give it its proper name, •Odorigui•, is the Japanese practice of eating live animals. One common odorigui dish is a small, transparent fish called •shirouo•, which is served in alcohol, and washed down with sake. More adventurous diners prefer to feast themselves on live octopus. To prepare this dish, the chef will remove the live octopus from a large tank, slice off one tentacle, and then simply serve it on a plate with some soy sauce. Apparently, the limb continues to writhe and twist on your plate, and when you eat it, the suckers attach themselves to the roof of your mouth. However, the Japanese are not alone in their taste for very, very fresh meat. In China, there is a popular dish called •drunken shrimp•, which is also eaten live. When the dish arrives, it comes swimming in a bowl of sweet alcohol, which is supposed to help make the shrimp a little less feisty and, because it's effectively in a drunken stupor, prevents it from escaping. The shrimp should be left to swim in the alcohol for about five minutes, before being eaten. The normal way to eat drunken shrimp is then to remove it from the bowl using chopsticks, and put in on a plate. The diner then removes the shrimp's head with their fingers, before munching on its twitching body. The Japanese also enjoy a similar dish called •drunken crab•. However, both these practices sound quite bland when compared with the extraordinary dish served at Pingxiang, on the border with Vietnam. Diners here buy live monkeys at the market, and then take them to a local inn, to have them prepared by a chef. This preparation consists of forcing the monkeys to drink large amounts of rice wine, until they pass out. Then, the chefs bind the monkey's limbs, chop open its skull, and scoop out the brains into a bowl. Apparently, the test of a well-prepared monkey brain is that the blood vessels should still be pulsing when the dish is served. The brains are eaten with condiments including pickled ginger, chili pepper, fried peanuts, and coriander. It is said that monkey brain tastes like tofu, which rather begs the question – •wouldn't it be simpler to just buy some tofu? Which dish, properly prepared, should contain just enough poison to numb your lips? The answer to this is the Japanese dish, •fugu•, which is also known as the puffer fish or blowfish. Fugu is regarded as an exceptional delicacy in Japan, and many liken the taste to chicken, although it is eaten more for the thrill than the taste, as fugu contains one of most powerful poisons found in nature. The fish's traditional nickname is the •teppo•, which means the pistol. In its natural environment, fugu is a peculiar-looking fish, that can puff itself up into a large,

round ball when threatened by predators. Beyond this, its main form of defense is the lethal poison contained in its internal organs, which is called 'tetrodotoxin'. One blowfish contains enough tetrodotoxin to kill 30 adult humans. Consequently, fugu chefs need to be exceptionally skilled and precise, to ensure that all the poisonous parts of the fish are removed before serving. In Japan, fugu restaurants specialize in its preparation and the removal of the fish's deadly poison. If the fish has not been prepared correctly with all of its poison removed, the toxins can destroy the nerve tissue inside a person's body, paralyzing the muscles necessary to breathe, and causing death within about four to six hours. The most poisonous part of the puffer fish is the liver, which should be completely removed during preparation. Apparently, a skilled fugu chef will leave just enough poison to numb your lips. Even so, it's probably best not to annoy the chef.

Why is civet poo coffee so expensive? The world's most expensive coffee is an Indonesian specialty called Kopi Luwak, which is believed to be the best in the world, and is very popular in Japan and America. Bizarrely, this coffee is made from beans which have been eaten and then excreted by the common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphrodites*). The palm civet is a small, bobcat-like mammal, which lives in certain rainforest regions of Indonesia. The palm civet's main diet consists of berries, insects, and other small mammals, but it also enjoys eating coffee beans. However, not just any old coffee beans will do, the fussy civet chooses only the reddest and ripest beans. These beans then pass almost unchanged through the palm civet's digestive system, before being pooped out, and then harvested by unfortunate plantation workers, before being sold for ludicrous sums to wealthy coffee fanatics. To buy just two ounces (57 grams) of Kopi Luwak coffee, which is only enough to make one cup, costs around £25.00, making it a very expensive way to start your day!

But what is it that makes Kopi Luwak taste so good? There seem to be two main possibilities. The exceptional flavor may result from the effect of the civet's digestive juices on the coffee beans. Alternatively, these digestive juices may have no real effect, and the answer may simply lie in the civet's fastidious pickiness, in only selecting the very ripest, reddest coffee beans.

Which is the world's tastiest insect? For centuries, many cultures around the world have been eating all sorts of insects and bugs. The practice even has a posh name – 'entomophagy'. In some respects, insects make quite a good meal. They are widely available, easy to cook, and highly nutritious; caterpillars, for example, are chock-full of protein and iron. Bugs that are commonly munched around the world include flies, beetles, dragonflies, grasshoppers, cockroaches, butterflies, moths, mosquitoes, beetles, ants, and even bees and wasps. In fact, there are over 1,400 species of edible insects. For example, in Nigeria, people enjoy snacking on crickets, which are disemboweled and then roasted over open coals.

Grasshoppers are also popular, and people working the fields will often eat them raw. In China, a nice warming bowl of earthworm soup is believed to help treat fever. On the coast of Macau, you can buy a bag of fried cockroaches. And on the streets of Bangkok, in Thailand, fried grasshoppers are sold in much the same way. In fact, people in Thailand eat a wide variety of insects, including cicadas, locusts, mantises, deep-fried crickets, grasshoppers (usually fried), and bamboo borers (these are small grubs, which are sometimes described on menus as 'fried little white babies'), steamed giant water bugs, weaver ants (which are eaten raw or rubbed with salt, chili or pepper) and their eggs (these can also be eaten as a paste), dung beetles, moth and butterfly pupae, wasp and bee larvae, termite soup, and even the revolting-sounding grilled tarantula. Meanwhile, in South America, tree worms and various stingless bees and wasps are widely eaten in Brazil. They are apparently known for their pleasant, almondy taste. In Columbia, culonas ants are also enjoyed for their nutty flavor. These winged ants are collected with large sweeping brooms, placed into boiling water, then taken out and dried on the grill. And in the United States worker ants of this species are often dipped into chocolate. Nor are Western countries immune from this kind of bizarre behavior. One company in California makes products such as the 'Cricket Lick-It', which is a tasty, sugar-free lollipop with, you've guessed it, a real cricket in the centre. Perhaps you'd prefer the Scorpion Sucker, which comes in an array of colors and flavors, such as blueberry and banana, and contains, predictably enough, a scorpion. If you're not feeling that adventurous, how about a tasty snack of worms? These come in a variety of flavors, including barbecue, cheddar cheese, and Mexican spice. Other products include the Antlix, a peppermint flavored lollipop, which contains real farm-raised ants – apparently, they taste similar to chili peppers, and are said to be good for giving you an energy boost. The Tequilalix is a tequila flavored lollipop, which contains a real worm. The VodkaLix is a vodka flavored lollipop, which also for good measure contains a scorpion. The scorpions are said to be heat-treated, to remove any toxins, to make sure they are safe to eat. However, if I had to choose which insect would be the most delicious, I think I might plump for the Australian honey ant. This insect is greatly prized by the Aborigines, who call them by the rather appetizing name 'yarrumpa'. This insect stores so much of a sugary fluid in its body, that its hind end swells up into a ball that is big enough to eat. People bite the bug's end off to savor the sweet stuff found inside. They say it's just like eating honey, only crunchier. How do you make 'bird's nest soup'? The Chinese delicacy 'bird's nest soup' is one of those rare dishes which sounds incredibly gross, but which is in fact far, far worse. This dish has been highly esteemed since the Ming dynasty, and it is said there is no higher honor one can

bestow upon a guest than to serve them bird's nest soup. The soup is prized for its rich nutrient content and purported health benefits. This rare and expensive soup is made from the nests of a certain type of swifts that live in caves. The nests themselves are made from the bird's saliva, and are formed high up in caves around Southeast Asia. This saliva sets into a solid, rubbery substance, which helps to glue the twigs to the cave wall. Collecting the swiftlets' nests from the bat-filled caves is a very ancient and very dangerous job. Nest collectors have to climb very high, and use long bamboo poles to remove the nests, which are found stuck to the roofs of the caves. To make bird's nest soup, chefs simmer the nests in chicken broth for hours, until they become rubbery. Once cooked, the nests are said to be chewy and fairly tasteless, which is why flavorings such as chicken stock are often added. One reason why this culinary delight is so highly prized is because it is believed to be an aphrodisiac, as well as being beneficial for lung problems. For centuries, the Chinese have encouraged their children to eat the soup, believing it will help them to grow.

Who eats tarantula omelets? Despite its frightening appearance, the tarantula spider is regarded as a delicacy by a number of cultures around the world. For example, roasted tarantula is eaten by the bushmen of central Africa, while people in northern Thailand reportedly like to strip off the spider's legs and roast the bodies. The Piaroa Indians of Venezuela enjoy eating the big, hairy, bird-eating 'goliath tarantula' (*Theraphosa leblondi*), which has a leg span of 25 centimeters (10 inches), and an abdomen the size of a tennis ball. The whole thing is the size of a dinner plate! The Piaroa hunt for tarantulas and when they've caught one, they bend its legs backwards over the body and tie them together, so it can be taken back to camp. To prepare the tarantula, a leaf is used to twist off the abdomen (to avoid touching the hairs, which can irritate the skin) and the spider is then rolled in a leaf, and roasted in hot coals. Once it's cooked, the spider is eaten by picking out the bits of flesh, rather like eating a crab. Apparently, tarantula tastes a bit like prawns. Bits of the meat can get stuck between your teeth, but luckily the tarantula's long fangs make excellent toothpicks! If the Piaroa manage to catch a female tarantula, they will squeeze the eggs out from her body, wrap them in a leaf, and roast them over a fire, to make a tarantula omelets. The eating of spiders is also very popular in Cambodia and Laos, where they are commonly toasted on a bamboo skewer over a fire, and served whole with salt or chilies. Alternatively, some people prefer their spiders fried in butter, with a clove of garlic.

Why did Nelson's navy eat their biscuits in the dark? In the 1700s, under Horatio Nelson's leadership, Britain had the most powerful navy in the world. However, conditions on board were truly disgusting, and Navy discipline was harsh. Floggings were frequent, the pay was low, hygiene was poor and the food was often infested with bugs. Before setting off, ships would be loaded with food,

including fruit, vegetables and live animals, but once the ship departed, it wouldn't be long before all the animals had been slaughtered, and the remaining food had rotted. As bread rapidly became moldy, the sailors instead ate 'ship's biscuits', also known as 'hard tack', which were made with flour, water and salt. These biscuits would often contain weevils or maggots, so the sailors would tap the biscuits on the table, to try and knock most of the bugs out before eating. For this reason, many sailors would wait until dark to eat them, so they wouldn't have to see the maggots crawling inside. The sailors' diet also included salted meat, which was so hard that it was practically inedible, even after being soaked and then boiled for hours. The meat was so dark and hard that some sailors developed a weird new craft – they would carve objects out of the meat, and then polish their sculptures. Cheese was preserved by dipping it in tar, which made it taste disgusting. One of the main constituents of a sailor's diet was a healthy ration of a gallon of beer a day. Although beer did not keep aboard ship for very long, it was drunk as a safer alternative to water, as water on board the ship would quickly become green and slimy. A ten year-old boy who served at Trafalgar wrote this letter home about the food: 'We live on beef which has been ten to eleven years in the cask and on biscuit which makes your throat cold in eating owing to the maggots which are very cold when you eat them, like calvesfoot jelly.' However, there was of course some fresh food available from the surrounding waters, such as fish, dolphins, sharks, and birds. Tortoises and turtles were also highly prized, as they could be kept alive for many weeks in the hold, without food or water, providing another source of fresh meat for the later stages of a voyage. And God forbid that you should fall ill. According to Tobias Smollett, a ship's doctor during this time, the sick berth on board was more likely to kill than cure. He wrote that patients were kept far below decks, deprived of daylight and fresh air, and breathing, 'nothing but the morbid steams exhaling from their own excrement and diseased bodies, devoured with vermin hatched in the filth that surround them.' What is the 'King Of Fruit'? The durian is a peculiar looking, disgusting smelling melon-like fruit, which is nonetheless considered a delicacy by millions of people in the Far East. In Indonesia, Malaysia, and especially Thailand, it is affectionately known as the 'King of Fruit'; and, despite its disgusting smell, it is widely sold in Southeast Asian markets. The durian fruit can weigh as much as ten pounds, and has a hard green shell studded with spikes. The fruit grows at the top of durian trees, which can reach up to 50 meters in height. As if this fruit were not unpleasant enough in its appearance and odor, it also presents a physical danger, as it has been known to drop from the branches and kill people below. Apparently, the durian has a pleasant taste, which is described as being like a rich buttery custard, highly flavored with almonds. Unfortunately, however, many people

find the smell far too off-putting to consider actually tasting the thing. This smell is variously described as being like excrement, stale vomit, or even like a dead rat decomposing in a plate of vomit. Travel and food writer Richard Sterling memorably described the durian as smelling like, 'pig shit, turpentine and onions, garnished with a gym sock.' Because of the durian fruit's awful smell, the governments of many Asian countries have banned people from taking the fruit onto public transport. It is also banned by most hotels and airlines in the region, and rental car agencies will reportedly fine you if the car stinks of it when you hand in the keys. However, the world of nature contains numerous other putrid plants which are just as stinky and vile as the durian. For example, there is the flower of the exotic plant *Amorphophallus*, from Sumatra, which is also referred to as the 'corpse flower'. This impressive plant has large petals and a phallic-like stem. It can reach a height of eight feet, but its most notable feature is its nauseous stench, which has been described as a mixture of excrement and rotting flesh. The foul smell is designed to attract flies, which help to pollinate the plant, and can be detected up to a kilometer away. *Aristolochia grandiflora*, also known as the Pelican Flower, is found in Brazil and the Caribbean. This alien-looking plant has a huge flower, which can reach more than one meter in length. However, its smell is so disgusting that wild animals actually stampede from the area when the plant blossoms. The flower *Rafflesia Arnoldi* is named after Sir Thomas Raffles, who was the founder of Singapore. It is a huge, impressive looking plant, with five mottled, orange-brown and white petals; the flower can measure up to a meter across. Unfortunately for Raffles, the smell of this flower has been described as being like rotten flesh, and because of this it is popularly known as the Stinking Corpse Lily. A pleasant amble through the woodlands of Europe or North America can quickly become disrupted if you come across a group of stinkhorns. These disgusting smelling fungi grow in rotting wood, and produce a smell which is said to be like decaying flesh. Their thick stalks, which grow to a height of around 25 centimeters, are capped with a liquid ball of a jellylike, foul-smelling green or brown slime. Flies and other insects are attracted by the smell, and wallow in the slime, becoming covered with fungal spores. They then carry the spores when they fly away, and in this way help the stinkhorns to disperse. How do you make a fly burger? Lake Victoria in Africa is the second biggest fresh water lake in the world. At certain times of the year, peculiar dense clouds appear and hover over the lake. These clouds are made up of trillions of lake flies, which make up the largest swarm on Earth. These swarming gnats are called 'E sami' by the local people, and the clouds are visible on the horizon from miles away. Unfortunately, increased pollution and sewage are helping to increase their numbers. Many of the flies reach land, and when this happens, the air becomes thick with flies, but the locals still carry on with their normal, daily

lives. In fact, the midges are positively welcomed, as people take advantage of this blight by catching the flies for food. Entire villages will come together to catch the flies, in items such as nets, baskets, pots and frying-pans. One popular way of catching the flies is simply to dampen the inside of a pan – the flies stick to it, and can then be cooked. Each village has its own recipe, but one of the most popular and widespread is the fly-burger, which is also extremely nutritious. Fly burgers are made by crushing a handful of flies, which are then molded into the shape of a burger, and left to dry in the sun. The burger is then cooked – some regions like to roast them, while others enjoy their fly burgers deep fried. Each burger contains around half a million flies, and seven times more protein than a beef burger.

What is a cod worm? Have you ever been tucking into your fish and chips, and noticed a worm inside your fish? If so, it was probably a type of round worm called a cod worm (*Phocanema decipiens*). Cod worms can grow to about four centimeters long, and vary in color from creamy white to dark brown. Although they are unsightly, they are actually quite harmless. The life cycle of the cod worm is a fascinating and complex one. The adult cod worms live and mate inside the stomachs of grey seals, specifically grey seals which have eaten worm-infested fish. The cod worm's eggs pass out of the seal and into the ocean via the seal's feces. The eggs then hatch into tiny worm larvae, which get eaten by small crustaceans such as shrimps. In turn, these small crustaceans get eaten by larger sea creatures, including fish such as cod and haddock. As the cod worm larvae reach the fish's stomach, they continue to grow, and eventually burrow through the stomach wall, into the flesh of the fish. Finally, the cod worm's life cycle comes full circle, when the fish is swallowed by another seal, and the process begins again. Although it must be quite unpleasant to find a worm in your dinner, cod worms are relatively harmless. The worms are killed by cooking or freezing the fish, and there is no evidence that anyone has ever had an illness associated with the cod worm. Occasionally, when you buy fresh fish, you might even find a live cod worm inside it, but even so, although they're pretty gross, they are harmless if eaten. And the incidence of infected fish is very small in relation to the thousands of tons of fish landed each year.

What are sweetbreads? Sweetbreads is a culinary term which refers to an animal's internal organs. The most commonly served sweetbreads are the thymus gland and pancreas, but chefs are also known to prepare the salivary and lymphatic glands. The thymus gland, which is known as the throat sweetbreads, is found near the base of an animal's neck. The pancreas, which we call the heart sweetbreads, is attached to the last rib, and lies near the heart. Generally, the throat sweetbreads of younger animals is preferred, because of its firm texture and delicate flavor. Sweetbreads can also be derived from lamb, calf and pigs. So why are they called sweetbreads? The most likely answer seems to be simply that chefs realized

that 'thymus' and 'pancreas' were not particularly appetizing sounding words on a menu, so instead they use the rather vague, pleasant sounding term 'sweetbreads'. What goes into a sausage? After a pig has been slaughtered, and the various sections of meat such as hams and bacon have been taken away and processed, the remains of the carcass have other uses. The thymus gland and the pancreas can be used as sweetbreads. The intestines are used as casings for sausages and hot dogs. The trotters are sold fresh, and the pig's bones are used to make gelatin, which is used to thicken foods, such as yoghurts and sweets. The remaining edible parts of the pig, including snouts, ears, faces (including eyelids and lips), hearts, kidneys, lips, eyelids, livers, stomachs, and tails, all end up in sausages and hot dogs. Laws are like sausages. It's better not to see them being made. --Otto von Bismarck, German politician (1815 - 1898)

Which dish contains six types of penis? Most of us delicate westerners would probably consider eating the genitals of an animal to be rather gross (unless it was part of a sausage, obviously), but not the Chinese. Some of these fearless gourmands choose to feast on animal penis, either steamed, roasted, or boiled. Fans of this unusual branch of gastronomy say that penises have numerous health benefits – they are low in cholesterol, they boost a man's sex drive, and they are also helpful for treating all sorts of ailments – although these claims do not seem to have been fully embraced by the scientific community.

So where, you're no doubt wondering, can I sample this delightful Chinese cuisine? At China's first specialty penis restaurant, of course. As consuming a penis is supposed to help boost virility, you will find a predominantly male clientele at this establishment. It is common to see businessmen and government officials dining here, and these lucky chaps are able to sample the members of dogs, deer, yaks, oxen, donkeys, horses, and even seals. One popular dish consists of a goat's penis, which is sliced, dipped in flour, fried, and served skewered with soy sauce. Another favorite is the hotpot, which contains a range of samples of what the restaurant has to offer: six types of penis, and four types of testicle, all simmered expertly in chicken stock.

Which cocktail contains a human toe? In Canada, 65,000 hardy souls have joined the elite membership of the 'Sourtoe Cocktail Club', by drinking a very unusual cocktail, into which the barman places a preserved human toe. According to the rules of the club, to become a true 'Sourtoer', the drinker must allow the toe to touch his or her lips while drinking. Pass this test, and you will receive a certificate to mark your achievement, as well as a story guaranteed to impress, or perhaps repulse, your friends and family for years to come.

So how did this bizarre practice start? And, more to the point, whose is the toe? According to the Sourtoe Cocktail Club (www.sourtoecocktailclub.com), there has been a succession of toes donated for this

purpose – The first toe belonged to trapper Louie Liken, for a time at least. In the 1920s, Liken became stuck in a blizzard with his brother Otto, and his big toe froze. To prevent the onset of gangrene, the toe would have to be amputated. However, Louie didn't trust doctors, and definitely didn't want to have to pay one, and most certainly was not prepared to make the 60 mile journey to Dawson to find one. Instead, he drank as much rum as he could manage, to anaesthetize the pain, and then got his brother to chop off the toe with his axe. The toe was discovered many years later by Captain Dick Stevenson while cleaning the brother's cabin, and it was he who ingeniously came up with the idea of the 'Sourtoe Cocktail', and started serving it at a hotel in Canada in 1973. However, in July 1980, a man called Garry Younger was trying for the Sourtoe record, and on his thirteenth glass of Sourtoe Cocktail, his chair tipped over backwards and he swallowed the toe. Of course, it was never recovered, so another one was needed. Toe number two was donated by a lady called Mrs. Lawrence, whose middle toe had been amputated many years before. The toe was kept in a jar of salt in the bar, but sadly got lost during a renovation. Toe number three was donated by another trapper, who had had to have it removed due to frostbite. Unfortunately, in 1983, the toe was swallowed by a baseball player from the Northwest Territories. But not to worry because – Toe number four was sent in by an anonymous donor, but was later stolen. The thief was identified, but refused to give the toe back. Only when the police threatened to charge him with the transportation of human body parts across the border, did he agree to return the pilfered digit. Toes five and six were donated by another anonymous donor, with medical connections, who gave the toes on the condition that his nurses got to drink the Sourtoe for free. The fate of these toes is uncertain. Toe number seven had been amputated from a diabetes sufferer, who decided to help out after reading about the Sourtoe plight in the newspaper. And finally the most recent toe, toe number eight, was donated by a person who, as a result of a lawnmower accident, had their toe cut off while wearing open toed sandals.

Do flies really puke on your food? The *Musca domestica*, better known as the common housefly, is found in almost every part of the world. It will eat almost anything, including rotting vegetables, animal carcasses, excrement, and vomit. This hairy six-legged insect's mouthparts comprise a proboscis, which is specially adapted for sucking up fluid or semi-fluid foods. The proboscis ends in a pair of oval-shaped fleshy labella, through which it sucks up the food. However, the housefly can only suck up foods which are in a somewhat liquid state. This means the fly has no problem sucking up thin fluids, such as milk or beer, or runny solids such as poo, spit, or mucus – the fly simply places its labella onto the food, and sucks it up. However, when the housefly's dinner consists of something rather more solid, such as dried blood, cheese, or cooked meats, it can't just suck these up. Instead, it has

to moisten these foods, using either spit, or the regurgitated contents of a previous meal – perhaps some partially digested rotten rubbish or dog poo, for instance. As well as providing moisture, this fly vomit contains an acid which helps to dissolve whatever the fly has landed on, making it possible for the fly to Hoover it up. The housefly has three pairs of legs which end in claws and a pair of fleshy pad-like structures called the pulvilli, which contain tiny hairs. These sticky hairs enable the fly to stick to even very smooth surfaces, such as glass. The pulvilli are also responsible for picking up harmful germs when the fly lands on things like dog poo, mucus, and rubbish. As a result, flies can carry more than a hundred disease-causing bacteria, including those that cause diarrhea, cholera, typhoid, and food poisoning.

What is maggot cheese? Many of us enjoy cheeses that are riddled with mould, such as stilton, but we would probably draw the line at a cheese infested with squirming maggots. But not the residents of Sardinia – Casu marzu, which literally means rotten cheese, is a Sardinian tradition, which more than lives up to its name. It is traditionally made with sheep's milk, into which flies have deliberately been allowed to lay thousands of eggs. When these eggs hatch, they produce translucent white worms, which grow up to around eight millimeters long. These worms produce a substance which causes the fat in the cheese to putrefy. The brown, decomposing cheese becomes a soft, sticky mass, that creates a spicy, burning sensation in the mouth when eaten.

Eating insect-ridden food presents a range of new challenges. For one thing, the maggot larvae can leap for distances of up to 15 centimeters, and have been known to jump into the cheese eater's eyes. For this reason, casu marzu eaters often first seal the cheese in a bag. This starves the maggots of oxygen, causing them to leap out from the cheese, and squirm at the bottom of the bag. Because of the obvious health risks, casu marzu is officially outlawed in Italy, but it can still be bought on the black market. One official from the Sardinian health department stated that anyone caught selling the cheese would be heavily fined, but admitted, 'As a Sardinian and a man, let me tell you, I have never heard of anyone falling ill after eating this stuff. Sometimes, it tastes real good.' Sometimes, extraordinary measures are taken to improve the flavor of cheese. In 1888, author J.G. Bourke received a letter from a doctor called Dr Gustav Jaeger, which informed him about an unusual cheese that had been sold in Berlin. Apparently, a storekeeper was punished, when it was revealed that he had been using the urine of young girls to make his cheese richer and more tasty. It was said that the cheese had proved very popular, and people had loved the taste.

What are 'one hundred-year-old eggs'? China's cuisine is not for the faint-hearted. From the skinned dogs displayed at markets, to the scorpion kebabs sold by traders, the Chinese display an admirably open-minded approach to food, which puts our prissy Western palates to shame. So, it's no

surprise to find out they also enjoy eating a dish called 'pi-tan', which is also known as 'one hundred year old eggs'. Despite the rather attention-seeking name, pi-tan eggs are actually only four years old, and are considered a great delicacy. To make pi-tan, the Chinese usually use duck eggs, which are left to soak in a mixture containing salt, lime, and tea leaves, for three months. After this, the eggs are then coated with a paste of clay, lime, ashes, and salt, and buried in the ground. They are left there for three or four years. After this time, the eggs are dug up, and then peeled, to reveal a green, cheesy yolk, and a yellow, gelatinous egg white. The raw, foul-smelling egg is then dipped in vinegar, and eaten.

What is 'tapping the Admiral'? In 1805, Admiral Horatio Nelson died in the Battle of Trafalgar on his ship, 'The Victory', and his body was shipped home to England for burial. There is a common mistaken belief that Nelson's body was transported back to England in a keg of rum. For that reason, to this day, rum is colloquially known as Nelson's Blood. However, it was in fact brandy, not rum, that preserved Nelson's body on the long journey back to England. At this time, most sailors who died at sea would also be buried at sea, so preserving Nelson's body presented an unusual challenge. It was the idea of the ship's doctor, Dr Beatty, to preserve Nelson's body by storing it in a barrel of brandy. According to legend, when the barrel was opened on the ship's return to England, most of the brandy was gone. Apparently, the sailors on board had been tapping the barrel for drinks of brandy, and this is where the saying 'tapping the Admiral' – which means illicit drinking – comes from.

Despite the silly title, this book is filled with fascinating information. I especially enjoyed reading about the crazy and gross things people eat in other parts of the world. Personally, I prefer that my meat is already dead and not moving when I eat it, but in some cultures monkey brains that are still pulsating, and fish you have to chase around on your plate are prized. Other questions of interest included; in which countries are people most likely to wash their hands after using the bathroom, has anyone carried out a head transplant, how long does a head remain conscious after being cut off by a guillotine, and how often were people buried alive prior to modern medicine & how long could you survive in a coffin. I recommend all of the books in this series. They are filled with weirdly fascinating knowledge that you'd never learn in school.

This book has inspired my kid to become a "journalist who specializes in writing about science". Francesca Gould is my favorite author. She has inspired me to become a scientific journalist. She makes that job sound fun, and it sound like it would be a fun job, although I'm only

10. Her books are some of the best books I've read in my life." Mother's note: WOW, you will have your kid telling you strange facts all the time if you give your kid this book series! How injecting frogs with human pee works as a pregnancy test, etc! Serious wizardry and witches brew stuff! Heh.

This book is wonderful, full of odd facts about things that you may have never thought about. Makes for a great afternoon read, and hey..you may even learn something that you never knew before..such as a cock roach farts every 15 minutes, some fish use farting as a means of communication, who knows, you may even have a worm growing inside you...wow lots of stuff to think about after reading this book.

Very informative book. My grandkids (teens) love it. I enjoyed it too, learned some things I didn't know. Very strange, because I didn't think I could learn anything else. I thought I already knew it all.

just title was fun...knew 11 yr old would love it. tricky way to get them to read and learn fun facts.

I got this book for my 17-year-old for Christmas. Full of all sorts of "interesting" stories relating to the "whys" of the world, such as why fish fart! Doesn't everyone want to know that? We've had a blast perusing this book.

Very interesting

The book was a christmas gift for my son. We all like the trivia. Its a lot of fun to share the book with one another.

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