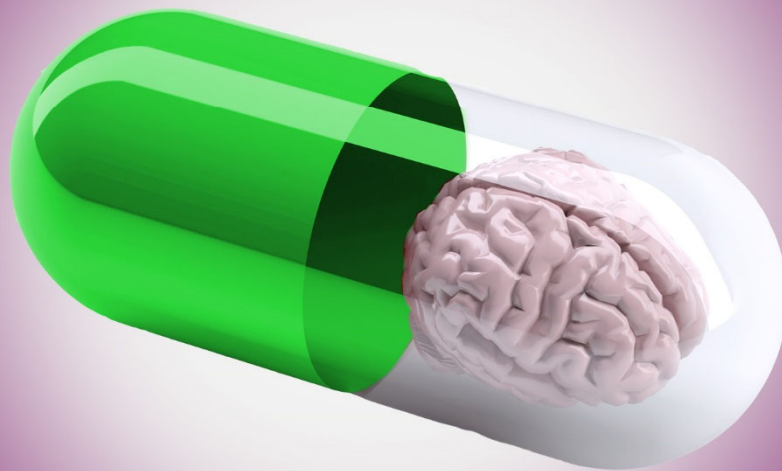


523

Hard To Believe

FACTS

**Better Explained, Counterintuitive and Fun Trivia
from the Creator of RaiseYourBrain.com**



NAYDEN KOSTOV

523 HARD TO BELIEVE FACTS

By Nayden Kostov

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PROLOGUE

I admit that most trivia books are insufferably boring. This book, however, is loaded with fun and verified facts, presented in a manner that will provide you with hours of entertainment. It will charge you with never-ending intellectual ammunition for a lifetime of parties. If you argue that it is useless information, you will be right until you know how to use it. Amaze your friends and family by telling them that, so far, every bearded US president has been a Republican or that female ferrets need to have sex at least once a year, otherwise, they risk dying of estrogen poisoning!

Following the success of my trivia website [RaiseYourBrain](#), I published "[1123 Hard to Believe Facts](#)", which was read by tens of thousands of people and accumulated hundreds of 5-star reviews on Amazon and GoodReads. "[853 Hard to Believe Facts](#)" followed and was even more successful. As the third instalment of this series, "523 Hard to Believe Facts" has more detail for each fact, as requested by previous readers.

This book can be fun for high school students too: even the most "spicy" entries, neatly separated in the chapter "Facts about human and animal sexuality", remain factual and abstain from profanity. To my greatest delight, an avid reader of my website explained that he was preparing daily fact sheets for his son's lunch box. He prints out three facts every day to create some lunch-time fun for his child and provoke his intellectual curiosity. Honestly, I wish my parents had done the same for me!

Chapter I



MYTH VS FACT

1. The number of moles is a good indicator of skin cancer.

It has been disproved. Additionally, recent studies claim that the more moles you have, the longer you live.

2. Music lessons improve math results.

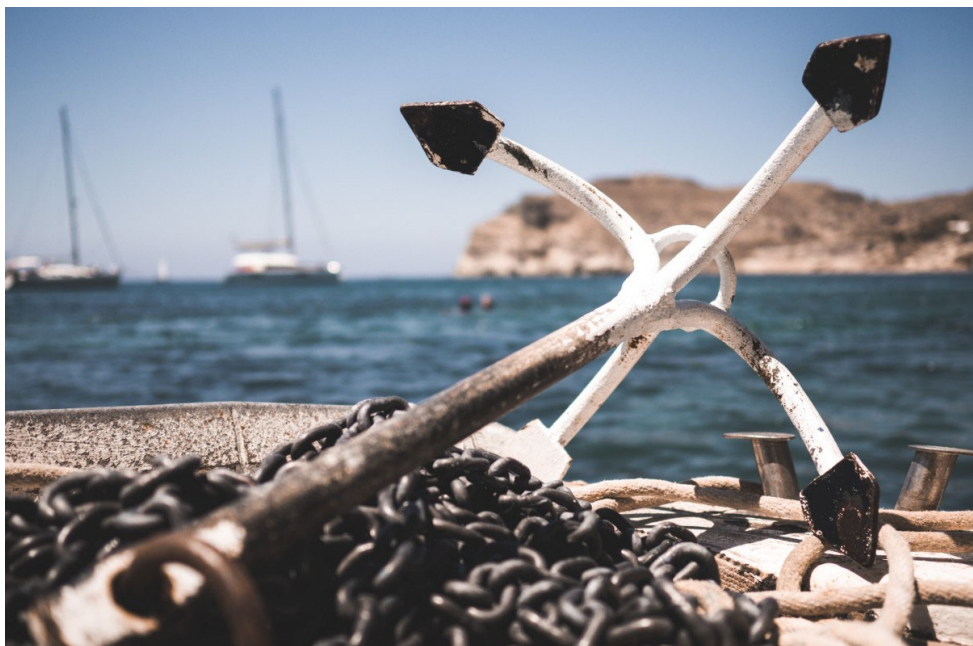
Taking music lessons simply means that you come from a richer family. And richer kids are known to have better access to private tutors and good quality education.

3. The piece of opera “Aida” was commissioned to commemorate the Suez Channel.

“Aida” was commissioned from Giuseppe Verdi to celebrate the opening of the Opera House in Cairo in early 1871. The Suez Canal had already opened in 1869. “Aida”, however, was not the opening opera. The scenery and costumes being made in Paris, France, did not make it in time to Cairo, Egypt.

4. The anchor stops the ship.

Actually, it is the weight of the chain and its friction with the sea bottom.



5. The US state of Colorado is a rectangle.

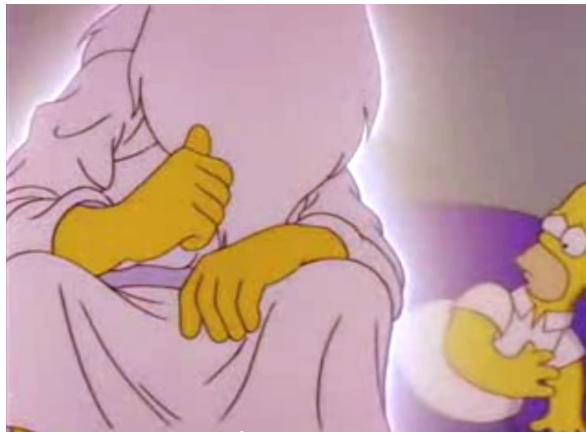
It has 697 “sides”, making it a *hexahectaenneacontakaiheptagon*.

6. Divers suffer from nitrogen narcosis.

While this is correct, few people know that breathing pure oxygen at depths more than 6 m (20 ft) can be lethal.

7. All characters in The Simpsons TV series have four fingers.

There is one exception: God has five.



8. The polygraph test is a lie detector.

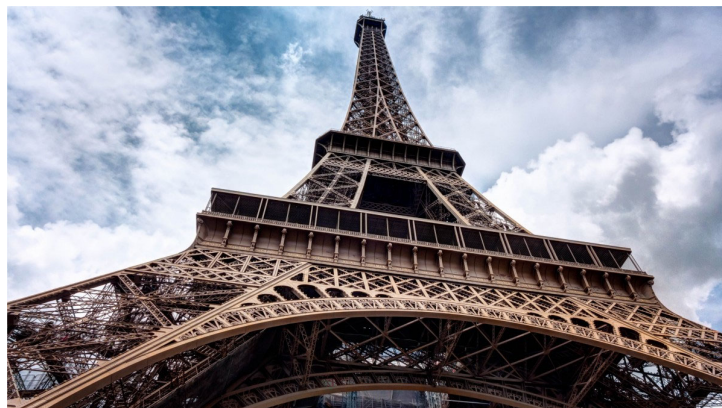
It is an arousal detector, not a lie detector.

9. “Kangaroo” was an answer meaning “I don’t understand you” when newly arriving Europeans asked the Australian Aboriginal people about the strange animal.

This proved to be a myth. “Kangaroo” was the word designating this animal in one of the local languages.

10. It is OK to share a picture of the Eiffel Tower at night while illuminated.

It turns out the light show at night was added in 1985 and is still protected under French copyright law as an artistic work. Technically, it is illegal to share, sell, or publish photos and videos of the night-lit Eiffel Tower without prior permission from the *Société d’Exploitation de la Tour Eiffel*.



11. Birds of prey use their sharp hooked beak for defence and attack.

They mostly use their strong feet and talons.

12. If your guests say the wine tastes like a cat's pee, they are being rude.

In wine-tasting, a 'cat-pee aroma' can be a compliment.

13. Tesla Model S is a zero-emissions all-electric vehicle and enjoys tax rebates worldwide.

Not everywhere: in 2016, a Tesla owner in Singapore was fined more than 10,000 US dollars for excessive emissions. Due to the local methodology of calculating CO₂ emissions equivalent, the car was deemed too polluting.

14. If you are a citizen of Monaco, you can go to the famous Casino in Monaco and gamble.

Actually, it is only allowed if you are a foreigner.

15. Greece is a southern country and its capital, Athens, is further south than foggy Tokyo, Japan.

Check a map, it is exactly the opposite.

16. Jupiter orbits the Sun.

The gas giant is so big that its centre of mass with the Sun, or barycentre, lies 1.07 solar radii from the middle of the Sun – or 7 percent of a Sun-radius above the Sun's surface. Both the Sun and Jupiter orbit around that point in space.

17. The dark side of the Moon is always dark.

Wrong, it was called the "dark" side because it was not visible from Earth and hence unknown, not because sunlight does not reach it. In the very beginning of 2019, a Chinese spacecraft became the first to land on the "dark" side of the Moon.



18. When you are in an aeroplane and experience a hard landing, it is due to poor pilot skills.

Not always: if the runway is covered in water, the aircraft has to touch down hard to avoid aquaplaning.

19. Tajikistan is the country with the largest Tajik population.

Wrong: more Tajiks live in Afghanistan than within Tajikistan. Tajikistan has a population of 8.7 million people, of which around 7.5 million are ethnic Tajiks; in Afghanistan, there are somewhere between 9 and 11 million Tajiks.

20. The fidget spinner – the toy everyone wanted in 2017 – was invented fairly recently.

Actually, it was patented back in 1993.



21. The practice of selling one's kidney for profit is illegal everywhere.

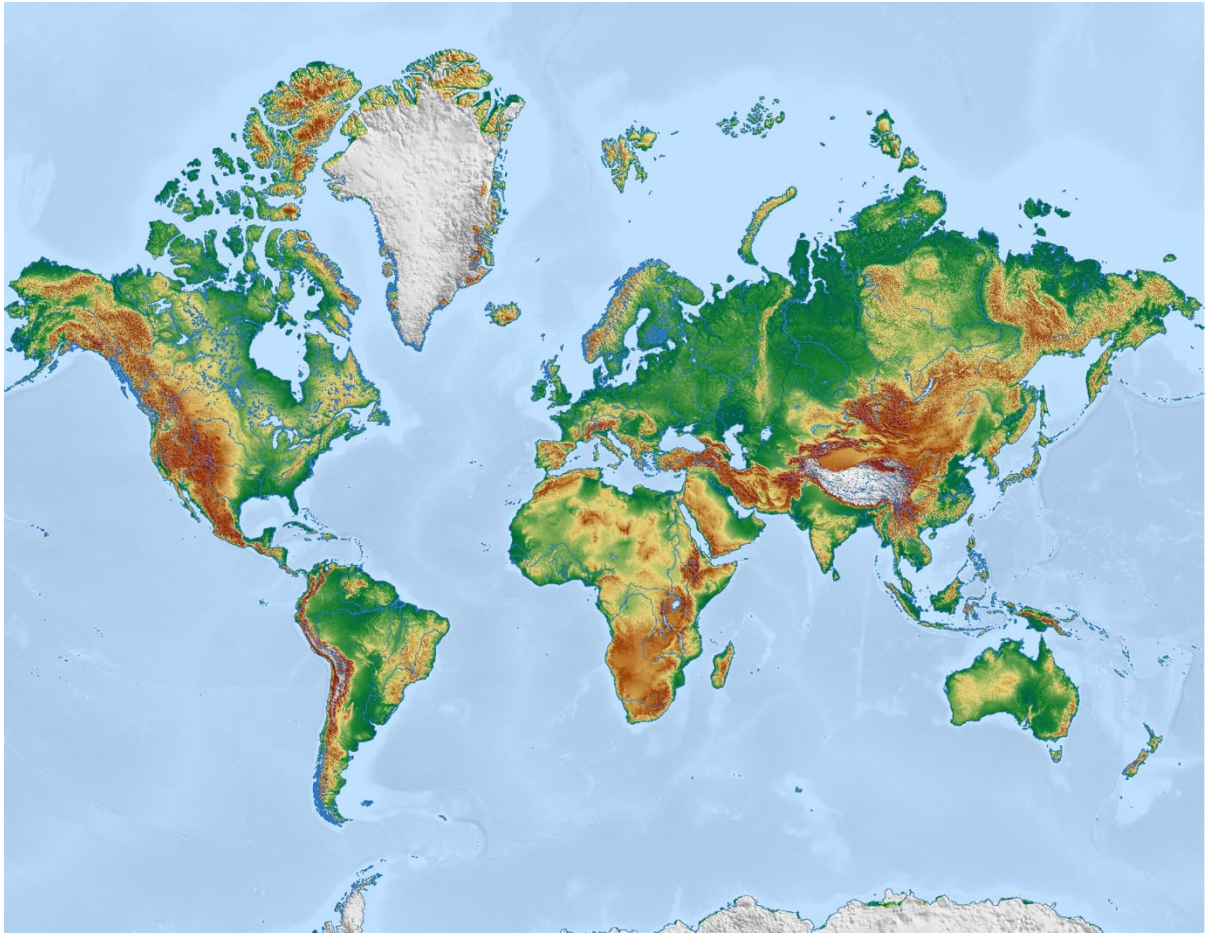
In Iran, it is legal and regulated by the government. In any given year, it is estimated that 1,400 Iranians sell one of their kidneys to a recipient who was previously unknown to them. Iran is currently the only country in the world that allows the sale of one's kidney for compensation (typically a payment). Consequently, the country does not have either a waiting list or a shortage of available organs.

22. Many US schools are handing out perfect-attendance certificates as a way to motivate students to show up and it works.

In 2014, researchers at Harvard, UCLA, and Stanford (USA), set up an elaborate experiment with more than 15,000 middle and high school students in California during the 2015-16 school year. Instead of boosting attendance, the certificates either did nothing or reduced attendance. Among students who were told about being eligible for perfect-attendance certificates ahead of time, their attendance did not budge. However, students who received the certificates as a surprise reward for their prior record subsequently started actually missing more days of school than a control group of students who were not eligible for the certificates.

23. On a standard geographical map, Greenland appears more or less the size of Africa.

In reality, Africa is 14 times as large.



24. The Mississippi river is longer than the Missouri.

The opposite is true. Although it is longer by just a little bit, the Missouri is considered a tributary to the Mississippi.

25. Lobsters have always been the expensive delicacy we know today.

Before the mid-19th century, lobsters were fed routinely to US prisoners, apprentices, slaves, and children. In Massachusetts, USA, some servants sought to avoid lobster-heavy diets by including stipulations in their contracts that they would only be served the shellfish twice a week. Locals used the massive pile of “cockroaches of the sea” as they used to call them, as fertilisers and fish bait.

26. Joseph Stalin’s words “The death of one person is a tragedy, but the death of one million is a statistic” are tasteless and wrong.

Unfortunately, he was somehow right. Psychologists have repeatedly found that people experience a greater emotional reaction to one death than to many, even if the circumstances are identical. Perversely, the more victims, the less sympathy people feel. The effect even has a name: *collapse of compassion*. It is not that we cannot care about a million deaths, psychologists believe: instead, we fear being overwhelmed and switch off our emotions in pre-emptive self-defence.

27. Bees have two eyes.

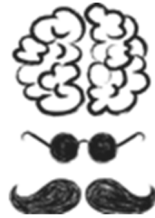
Bees have five eyes. The two big eyes on a bee are called compound eyes because they are made up of thousands of tiny lenses. Each lens (called a facet) sees a small part of a scene and, all together, the lenses form an entire picture. You can compare it to a tile mosaic where tiles of different colours are put together to form a picture. The three other eyes are called simple eyes or *ocelli*. They are at the top of the bee's head in a triangular pattern and are very small. These eyes do not see images but can detect light, especially changes in light.



28. Robots are a recent creation.

The first robot was created much earlier than what most people think. A steam-powered “pigeon” was created around 400 to 350 BCE by the ancient Greek mathematician Archytas. This robo-bird was made out of wood and used steam to power its movements. It could fly about 200 meters before running out of steam.

Chapter II



UNBELIEVABLE FACTS ABOUT VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING

1. Some airlines forbid their pilots from growing beards. The reason is that an oxygen mask should fit tightly on the face if an emergency situation occurs, and a beard could prevent this.
2. In 2017, Saudi Arabia became the first country to give citizenship to a robot. Her name is Sophia.



3. In Luxembourg, it is illegal to defrost your car by keeping the engine running while the car is stationary.
4. The number of teenagers in a car proportionally increases the chances of having a car accident.
5. Singapore has four official languages from four different linguistic families: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil.

6. In Sweden, a Speed Camera Lottery rewards drivers who obey the speed limit with the money raised through fining those who exceed it.
7. The only member of ZZ Top who did not have a beard was Frank... Beard! He has sported a goatee since 2013.



8. The French Fencing Federation recognised lightsabre duelling as a sport in early 2019.
9. The notorious US gangster, Al Capone, was the first to call for putting expiration dates on milk bottles. After his niece had become extremely ill due to drinking bad milk, the influential Chicago mobster lobbied aggressively for expiration dates to be put on milk for the safety of children and pregnant women.
10. There are mountains with the colours of the rainbow at several locations worldwide. The most popular are those in Peru and China.



11. In 2018, Emile Ratelband, a Dutchman aged 69, petitioned the courts to allow him to identify as 20 years younger on the grounds – among other things – that it would yield him more matches on Tinder. The court rejected his attempt.
12. If you fold a piece of paper 42 times, it will be so thick that it could reach the Moon.
13. The 2003 World Aquatics Championship took place in Barcelona, Spain. It will be remembered as the first time when the medals were filled with water.
14. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Nauru was the richest country per capita. All essential services used to be free, and there was no taxation. Now, it is among the five poorest countries in the world. They became rich due to bird poo (guano), and now, they are poor because their source of wealth has been depleted and savings lost due to corruption.
15. Helen Adams Keller (1880-1968) was a US author and political activist. She became the first deaf-blind person worldwide to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree.
16. Initially, Coca-Cola was intended to serve as a cure for morphine addiction and, until 1903, contained cocaine.
17. Hungarian Károly Takács was the first to win two Olympic gold medals in the 25-metre rapid-fire pistol event. He did that with his left hand. This would hardly be a surprising fact, but we have to take into account that he was right-handed and learned how to shoot with his left hand only after his right one was seriously injured.



18. In 2017, a test proved that the Audi TT sports car accelerates faster when towed by a Tesla Model X, rather than when using its own engine and wheels.
19. A carat is a unit of mass equal to 0.2 g (0.007 oz) used for measuring gemstones. Maybe you never thought about that, but a carat is a metric unit with no imperial equivalent.
20. In Thailand, touching the queen was punishable by death. In 1880, the queen drowned as no one dared to save her when she fell in the water from the royal boat. Numerous witnesses watched her drown and did not dare to help.

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I hope you have enjoyed this sample. The book is already available on all Amazon marketplaces worldwide.

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