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The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don't know which ones.



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There's always new improbable — it's not what you expect! — stuff on the **Improbable Research blog** at [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com)



On the Front Cover

Questions marks arranged questionably.

Some Coming Events

(See [IMPROBABLE.COM](https://improbable.com) for details of these and other events.)

May 2, 2025

— UCLA,
Los Angeles, California, USA

May 3, 2025

— CALPACS,
Santa Barbara, California, USA

May 5, 2025

— UC Irvine, California, USA

May 23-26, 2025

— Balticon,
Baltimore, Maryland, USA

May 28, 2025

— Washington, D.C., USA

September 2025

— The 35th First Annual
Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

September 2025

— Ig Nobel Face-to-Face

November 7-9, 2025

— Falling Walls,
Berlin, Germany



MEDICAL QUESTIONS

Somewhat-unknowns pertaining to health and related matters

compiled by Philberta Kim, Improbable Research staff

Why Are Medical Journals So Dull?

"Why Are Medical Journals So Dull?", Richard Asher, *British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 5094, 1958, pp. 502-503. The author, at Central Middlesex Hospital, UK, explains:

There are many causes of their dullness; some are curable and some incurable. I do not separate them: this is a short study of the pathology, not a dissertation on the prophylaxis and treatment of the condition.

Why Are Medical Journals So Badly Written?

"Why Are Medical Journals So Badly Written?", Tim Albert, *Medical Education*, vol. 38, no. 1, January 2004, pp. 6-8. The author, in Dorking, UK, explains:

What seems to have happened is that authors, far from seeing pompous writing as bad, have come to value it.

WHY ARE MEDICAL JOURNALS SO DULL?

BY

RICHARD ASHER, M.D., F.R.C.P.

Physician, Central Middlesex Hospital, London

Medical journals are dull; I do not think there is any doubt about that. There are many causes of their dullness; some are curable and some incurable. I do not separate them: this is a short study of the pathology, not a dissertation on the prophylaxis and treatment, of the condition.

Wrappers and Covers

Their wrappings are drab and difficult to remove, so the journals accumulate on our desks in inconvenient piles and roll on to the floor. There is little incentive to make the effort of opening them. When opened they have a strong tendency to roll themselves up again.

Why are medical journals so badly written?

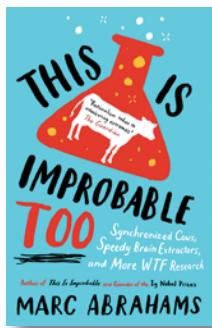
Tim Albert

If there's one thing that unites editors of medical journals, it is the need for simple English. More than 30 years ago, in a classic text, Charles Thorne wrote: 'Simplicity and clarity are the features of good scientific writing. Clear thought can

called 'a characteristic of the comic book professor, not the good writer'. The passive voice abounded; for example: 'Extensive evaluation, using a prepost intervention trial model, was carried out' (rather than: 'We used a

Editors (and technical editors) say that they try to keep things simple, but are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of articles written in bad English

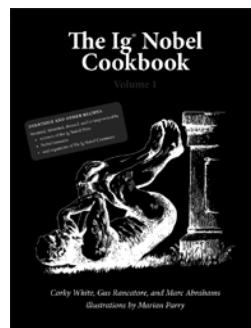
Improbable Research Books!



This Is Improbable Too

by Marc Abrahams
OneWorld Publications
ISBN 978-1780743615

*"Almost
dementedly
inconsequential."
— The Daily Mail*



The Ig Nobel Cookbook, Vol. 1

by Corky White, Gus Rancatore,
& Marc Abrahams
ISBN 978-1939385161

*"No matter how
many cookbooks
you've read,
you've not seen
one like this
cookbook."*

MEDICAL QUESTIONS [CONT'D]

Insects Under the Skin? Or Just in Their Minds?

"Insects Under the Skin? Ziploc and Matchbox Evidence in the Expert Forensic Stain Laboratory," Kristina Baumjohann and Mark Benecke, *Case Reports and Reviews*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2023. The authors, at International Research and Consulting, Cologne, Germany, explain:

Those affected by so-called delusional parasitosis believe that their bodies are infested with insects, parasites, worms, or fungi; this delusional perception may also extend to inanimate or "unknown, as yet unexplored" objects, so-called Morgellons....

The idea of insects living inside and on the (human) body literally drives people affected by the thought crazy. We receive samples containing alleged insect stain evidence on a regular basis which on examination mostly turn out to be non-animal fragments of skin, hair, fibers et cetera. Those insects (mostly parts) found in the samples cannot survive in or on the human body and do not cause the reported health problems. We present cases from our forensic laboratory, collected over twenty years, together with information about the samples and our way to handle the clients.

Where Do All the Strange Urinary-Stone-Related Names Originate?

"Whewellite, Weddellite and Company: Where Do All the Strange Names Originate?" D.B. Leusmann, *BJU International*, vol. 86, no. 4, 2000, pp. 411-413. The author, at Malteser Krankenhaus St. Hildegardis, Germany, explains:

Urinary stones usually consist of up to 90-95% of crystals; the crystal types are well known and some occur geologically.... The purpose of this review is to describe the men who are the namesakes of these minerals which occur in urinary stones, or to explain the origin of the mineral names not attributed to humans (e.g., apatite) and to give anecdotal details of interest....

Struvite ($MgNH_4PO_4 \cdot 6H_2O$) — Little information is available about Heinrich G. von Struve (1772-1851), a Russian diplomat, mineralogist and geologist living in Hamburg, Germany. Elsewhere he is referred to as Baron von Struve. Struvite occurs naturally in marshy soil under dung-pits.

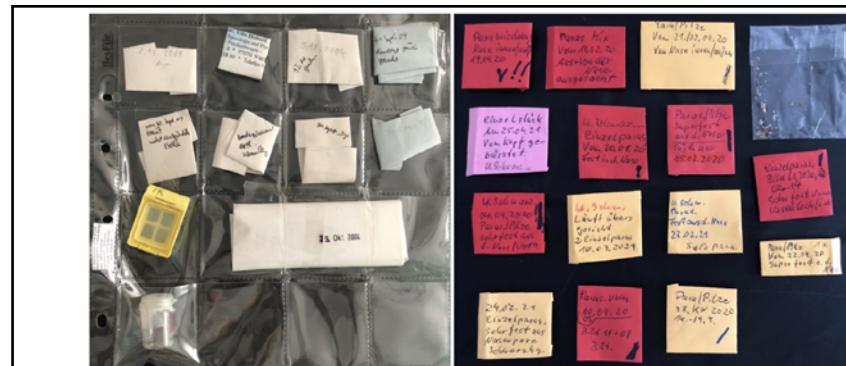


Figure 1. "Matchbox symptom" related stains: Clients with delusional parasitosis send their (numerous) samples individually packed: left: case 7; right: case 8. For further explanations, see text.

Detail from the study "Insects Under the Skin? Ziploc and Matchbox Evidence in the Expert Forensic Stain Laboratory."

Whewellite, weddellite and company: where do all the strange names originate?

D.B. LEUSMANN
Malteser Krankenhaus St. Hildegardis, Cologne, Germany

Introduction

Urinary stones usually consist of up to 90-95% of crystals; the crystal types are well known and some occur geologically. Except for apatite, which is a very common mineral, most of these substances are very rare in rocks

to have considerably influenced Darwin in devising his theory of evolution. Perhaps the success that Whewell achieved in nearly every domain in which he was interested was ascribable to one of his famous quotes: 'Every failure is a step to success' [3]. More details about this interesting scientist are available in [4].

Weddellite ($CaC_2O_4 \cdot 2H_2O$)

This mineral was not directly named after James Weddell (1787-1834; Fig. 2) but according to the place where it was first found, the Weddell Sea in the Antarctic [5]. Weddell was a great Antarctic explorer who admired



Fig. 1. William Whewell.

Detail from the study "Whewellite, Weddellite and Company: Where Do All the Strange Names Originate?"