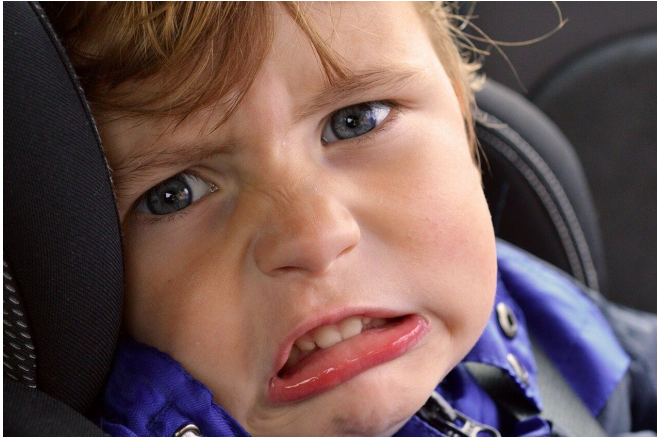


# Disgusted? Good. It could be beneficial to your health, a new study shows

22 February 2021, by Christine Clarridge



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Eww, gross!

There's no need to feel there's something wrong with you if you recoil when foodie friends talk about the interesting delicacies they've tried: still-beating cobra hearts, soft-boiled fetal duck or even the more banal chocolate-covered crickets. And you don't need to change—in fact, these reactions could keep you healthy.

Disgust, it turns out, is good for you, according to a new study published this week in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that suggests revulsion could be the body's way of avoiding [infection](#).

The idea is not new: Charles Darwin hypothesized that humans evolved a sense of [disgust](#) to help avoid tainted food, but this is the first study to have directly tested whether greater pathogen disgust sensitivity is associated with fewer current infections, according to a Washington State University write-up on the study.

Aaron D. Blackwell, an associate professor of

anthropology at WSU and co-author of the study, said participants from three indigenous Ecuadorian Shuar communities were asked to rate their level of disgust on things like touching a dead animal, stepping in animal droppings or drinking a fermented corn drink, chicha, made in this instance by someone with rotten teeth chewing the corn and spitting it into water to let it ferment.

"The higher the level of disgust, the lower the level of their inflammatory biomarkers indicative of infections," he said. "While the study shows that disgust functions to protect against infection, it also showed it varies across [different environments](#), based on how easily people can avoid certain things."

Blackwell, along with a research team led by Tara Cepon-Robins of University Colorado Colorado Springs also found that levels of disgust went up when people had access to fresh water and purchased food and could afford to avoid disgusting things.

But in the communities that relied more heavily on subsistence activities like hunting and small-scale agriculture, there were lower levels of disgust.

Blackwell pointed out in an interview with The Seattle Times this week that the findings do not have bearing on every pathogen or pandemic, including the coronavirus, which sickens before symptoms appear.

"Disgust doesn't protect us very well against pandemics like COVID-19 in part because there isn't something you can see to avoid."

Nevertheless, avoiding things that disgust you seems like a good overall bet.

**More information:** Tara J. Cepon-Robins et al. Pathogen disgust sensitivity protects against infection in a high pathogen environment,

*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*  
(2021). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2018552118](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2018552118)

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