

A TENSE YOUR MUSCLES

B THINK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE

HOW DO YOU BLOCK A TICKLE?

C PLACE YOUR HANDS ON TOP OF THE TICKLER'S HANDS

D HOLD YOUR BREATH AND STICK OUT YOUR TONGUE

Most of us feel ticklish on

at least some part of our body. But for many of us, while it might make us laugh, the experience of being tickled is not exactly **enjoyable**. Far from it. In fact, some people even have a **tickle phobia**. It's called **pteronophobia**. Although that sounds rather more like a fear of pterodactyls.

TICKLE, TICKLE!



Anyway, wouldn't it be amazing if you could **block** the tickly feelings of a tickle, stopping your **evil tickler** in their tracks? Well, you can. Want to know **how**? Thought you might.

Distracting your brain by focusing on something else might help **a little**. Like the most boringly unfunny thing you can think of. Say, **granny's nightie**? Or the weather forecast. Or the prospect of **tidying your room**. However, if that fails, the absolute **best** way to block a tickle requires us to understand a little about the **brain** and **why** we feel ticklish in the first place.

Have you ever noticed that you **can't tickle yourself**?

Try it. Doesn't work, right?

You see, for us to feel ticklish, our brain has to be **surprised**. This makes good sense. You see, back in **caveman** days, a surprising feeling on our skin was likely to have been a sneaky little **creature** coming along to bite or sting or scratch us, or even infect us with a **deadly disease**. There weren't any doctors or hospitals back then, so having tickly feelings helped us to **react quickly** to **unexpected** and potentially **dangerous** creatures, causing us to **flick** them away.



While we might have **evolved** a lot since then, like in our ability to eat with a knife and fork and do algebra (although perhaps not at the same time), many of our **survival instincts** still remain the same.

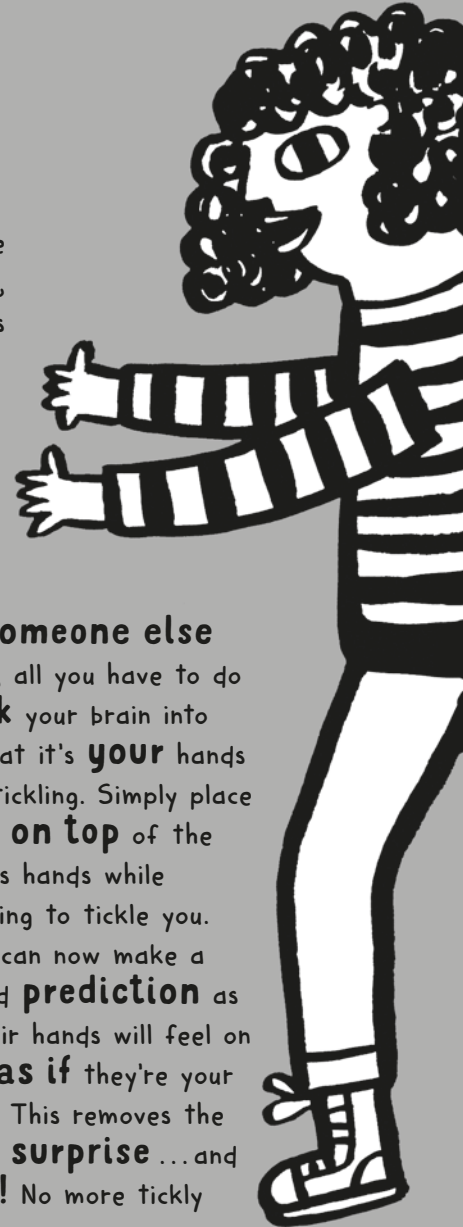
And this ancient **survival response** to tickly tormentors occurs in modern-day **animals** too. You might have seen a horse give a good old **shudder** to try and get rid of a tickly fly that's landed on its back, or **flick** the irritating insect off with its tail.



But what if you were to feel ticklish every time **anything** brushed against the tickly parts of your skin, even if it **wasn't a surprise**? You'd fall about laughing every time you put on your shoes and socks! To prevent this, your brain **blocks** the tickly feelings when it's your **own hands** doing the tickling. As your hands move towards your body, a part of your brain makes a **prediction** as to exactly how they are going to **feel** on your own skin, which blocks your tickle response.



So when **someone else** tickles you, all you have to do is to **trick** your brain into thinking that it's **your** hands doing the tickling. Simply place your hands **on top** of the evil tickler's hands while they're trying to tickle you. Your brain can now make a pretty good **prediction** as to how their hands will feel on your skin, **as if** they're your own hands. This removes the element of **surprise** ... and ... **bingo!** No more tickly feelings.





THE ANSWER IS (TO BLOCK A TICKLE, SIMPLY PLACE YOUR HANDS ON TOP OF THE TICKLER'S HANDS.

BY THE WAY, THERE IS ONE PLACE WHERE YOU CAN TICKLE YOURSELF - CAN YOU FIND IT? THE ROOF OF YOUR MOUTH. TRY IT. DID YOU SQUEAK?!

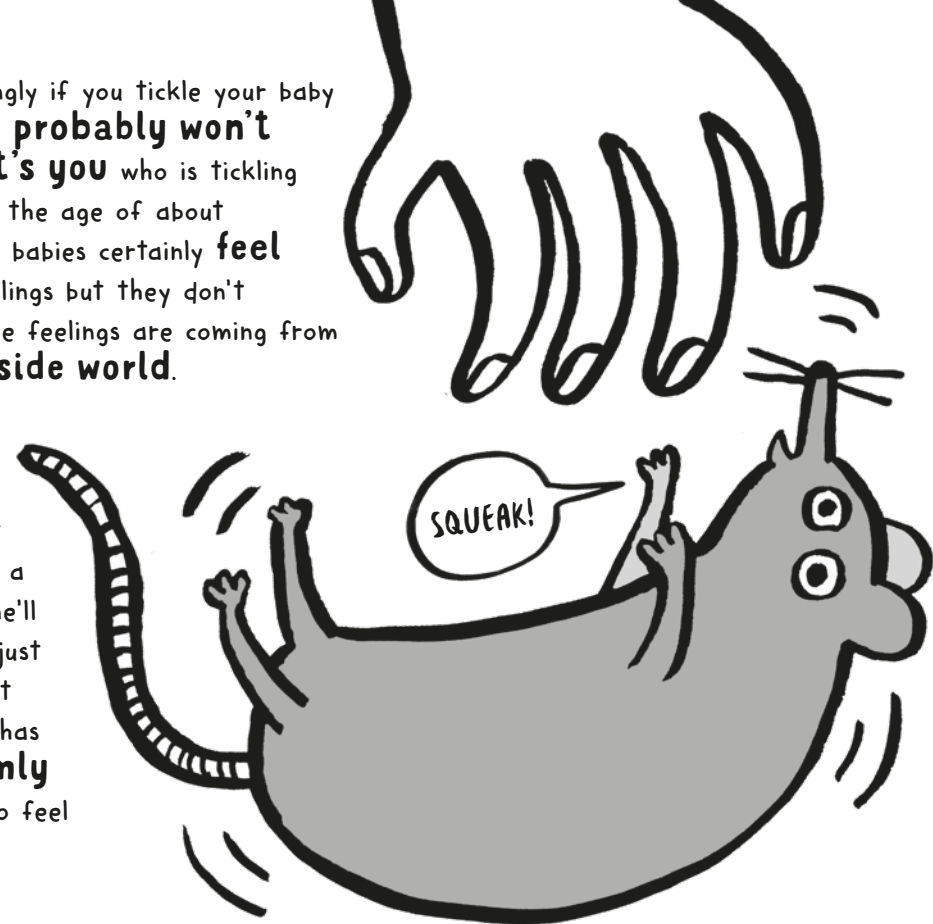
Being ticklish is not just a survival response to protect us from harm. There is also a rather different type of tickle that exists to make us **laugh** - releasing feel-good hormones such as **oxytocin** that make us feel all **soft** and **squishy**, helping us to **bond** with our tickler. Assuming you actually like them enough to **not mind** being tickled by them.

Interestingly if you tickle your baby sister she **probably won't know it's you** who is tickling her. Until the age of about 6 months, babies certainly **feel** tickly feelings but they don't realise the feelings are coming from the **outside world**.

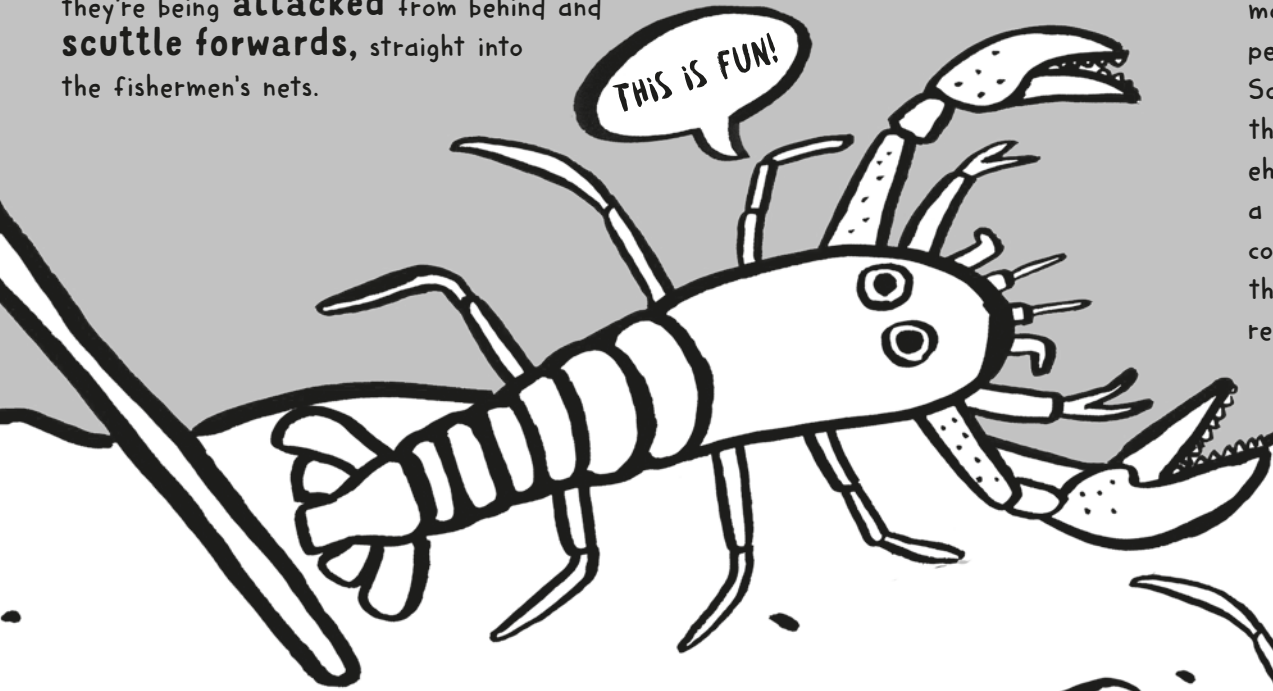
So if you tickle her toes she might **gurgle** a bit but she'll probably just think that her foot has **randomly** started to feel all funny.

Other than us humans, **few animals** are programmed to get this kind of **pleasure** from tickling. It makes sense that chimps, gorillas and orangutans - being our **closest living relatives** - quite like the odd tickle. But bizarrely the only other animal that seems to **enjoy** being tickled is ...

a rat. When tickled on their backs and bellies, rats not only **jump with glee**, but they even let out high-pitched **squeaks** of pleasure. A sort of ratty giggle. Perhaps we should call it a **riggle?!** And when the tickling stops, the **riggling** rats chase their tickler's hand around their cage, as if begging to be tickled again!



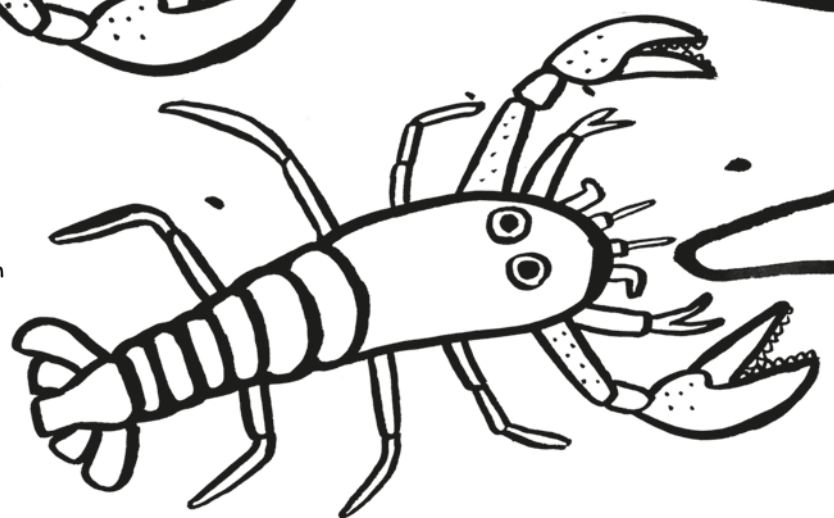
Apart from amusing rats or tormenting your little sister, mastering the **art of tickling** can have its uses. For example if you wanted to catch a **lobster**. Obviously, **Lobster-hunters** in the South Florida waters encourage spiny lobsters out of their holes by **tapping** them gently, just behind their tail, using what's known as a **tickle stick**. The poor unsuspecting lobsters think they're being **attacked** from behind and **scuttle forwards**, straight into the fishermen's nets.



Whilst tickling might be a good way to catch lobsters, and laughter can help **strengthen** our close relationships, please don't go around tickling all your friends **willy-nilly**. Unless of course it's to teach them the tickle-block trick. You see, some people really

don't like being tickled. In fact it can make them feel pretty **scared**. Especially if you're **bigger** and **stronger** than them. Tickling was even used as a form of **torture** during World War II.

So **check in** with your tickle-buddy first, and please **listen** if they say **stop**. It might **look like** they're laughing their head off, but tickling activates a part of the brain that causes **smile-like** movements of the face, even if the person **isn't actually happy**. So, you can't **assume** that they're enjoying it. Weird eh? No wonder it's a **pain** trying to convince your tickler that you're not really having fun.



SPEAKING OF PAIN, DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE'S A PART OF YOUR BODY THAT CAN'T FEEL ANY PAIN? YES, THAT'S RIGHT, YOU SEE THE SKIN ON YOUR ...