

HOUDINI'S WATER ESCAPE

The "Chinese Water Torture Cell" was a trick made famous by the great Harry Houdini in the early 1900s. He was able to hold his breath for long enough to escape from a locked tank of water.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?



Name:
HARRY HOUDINI

Date of Birth:
24 March 1874

Profession:
Escapologist

Signature:

Harry Houdini

Hungarian-born Ehrich Weisz moved to the United States in 1876 and later took the stage name of Harry Houdini. One of the world's greatest escapologists, he was famous for being able to escape from padlocks, chains, and even coffins!

THE STUNT

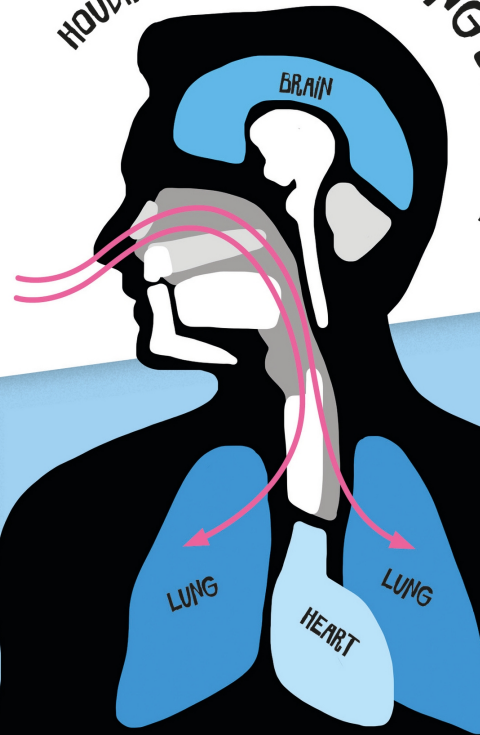
Houdini was lowered upside down into a specially built water tank with his feet shackled to the top. Audience members were allowed to check that the tank was sealed and the locks were secure. Then everything was hidden under a cover. Suspense built over the next 3 minutes before Houdini emerged to wild applause. Houdini was a master at picking locks, which might explain how he could release his feet. It may also be true that the shackles had a secret release mechanism. The big mystery is how he was able to survive underwater for so long.

HOLDING YOUR BREATH - WHAT HAPPENS?

The key to Houdini's impressive trick was his ability to hold his breath for a *really* long time. Breathing air into your lungs is how your body gets oxygen into your blood, where it's used to make energy. In the process, it's converted into carbon dioxide, which you breathe out. When you hold your breath (**which can be dangerous, so don't try this yourself!**), the carbon dioxide builds up in your body and increases the levels of acid in your blood. Here's how Houdini fought the body's basic need to breathe:

1. Through practice, he was able to slow his body down and use up oxygen more slowly. His heart rate would decrease and his body would only send blood to vital organs such as his brain.
2. Houdini increased his lung capacity by keeping fit and performing on an empty stomach. This meant he could breathe in more air.
3. He used meditation to reduce the urge to breathe.

HOUDINI HAD INCREDIBLE LUNG CAPACITY



INCREDIBLE DIVERS

Free divers swim deep down into the ocean without oxygen canisters. They are experts at holding their breath and can stay underwater for longer than most people. At 100 m (328 ft) below the surface, the pressure of the water on a diver's body is so high that their lungs are squished to the size of drink cans!