

## Teflon diet, garlic milk and zebra cows triumph at 2025 Ig Nobel prizes

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Have you ever read about any unusual or surprising scientific discoveries? What were they?
- If you could investigate anything using scientific research, what would you choose and why?

#### 2 Key words

a. Write the words in bold in the article next to the following definitions.

1. a piece of furniture to store shoes \_\_\_\_\_
2. behaving as if you are more important or better than other people \_\_\_\_\_
3. talking too proudly about yourself or your achievements \_\_\_\_\_
4. a plant with a strong smell and taste, often used in cooking \_\_\_\_\_
5. the process of becoming bigger, taller or increasing in amount \_\_\_\_\_
6. feeling proud or pleased because of respect or attention from others \_\_\_\_\_
7. the things in food that help people live and grow \_\_\_\_\_
8. the state of being overweight in a way that is unhealthy \_\_\_\_\_
9. happening after someone has died \_\_\_\_\_
10. praise, respect or attention for someone's work or achievements \_\_\_\_\_
11. having a bad or unpleasant smell \_\_\_\_\_
12. the outside or top layer of something \_\_\_\_\_

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is often used in Italian and Asian cooking.
2. Emma felt \_\_\_\_\_ to be invited to speak at the conference.
3. The rubbish bin is a bit \_\_\_\_\_. Can you clean it, please?
4. Dickens's last novel was published \_\_\_\_\_ in 1870.

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5. Jamie's \_\_\_\_\_ behaviour made it difficult for others to work with him.
6. Good \_\_\_\_\_ is important for children's health and learning.
7. The company showed \_\_\_\_\_ of Kate's hard work by giving her a pay rise.
8. Danny couldn't stop \_\_\_\_\_ about winning the swimming competition.
9. The city has seen a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ in its population over the last ten years.
10. Too much fast food can lead to \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Ice usually forms on the \_\_\_\_\_ of Lake Erie in winter.
12. Dad always leaves his old trainers on the floor instead of putting them on the \_\_\_\_\_.

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*Researchers into idea to blend powdered PTFE into food as a zero-calorie filler to curb hunger win chemistry prize*

**Steven Morris**  
**20 August, 2025**

- 1 For decades, scientists and doctors have battled to solve the **obesity** crisis. Now, researchers have won an Ig Nobel prize for an unusual new idea: reducing people's weight with a chemical that is found on the **surface** of Teflon saucepans. The group behind this idea is one of 10 to win prizes at this year's Ig Nobel awards, which celebrate research that first makes people laugh and then makes them think. The awards, however, are not to be confused with the more serious Nobel Prize awards.
- 2 One group of winners discovered that alcohol helped people's foreign language skills; that cows disguised as zebras got fewer insect bites, and that people became more **arrogant** after being told they were intelligent, even when they weren't. Another prize went to a doctor who measured the **growth** of his nails for 35 years.
- 3 "I feel **honoured**," said Dr Rotem Naftalovich at Rutgers University in New Jersey, whose work on the Teflon diet won the chemistry prize. Although the US Food and Drug Administration was interested, "I don't think they wanted to review it because it was such a silly idea," Naftalovich said.
- 4 The peace prize went to a German, Dutch and British team who showed that drinking vodka improved people's foreign language skills. "A tiny amount seemed to make people more confident at speaking a foreign language," said Dr Fritz Renner, a psychologist at the University of Freiburg.
- 5 But the improvement wasn't huge. "It's not like people were transformed into perfect Dutch speakers after a single drink," added Prof Matt Field, a psychologist at the University of Sheffield who worked on the study.
- 6 Food was a common theme in the 2025 awards. A study into the effect of diet on mothers' milk flavour won the prize for showing that babies drank for longer after their mothers ate **garlic**. An Italian team won the physics prize for understanding the point at which cooked pasta sticks together. Another group won the **nutrition** prize for discovering that, even when they had a choice, rainbow lizards in Togo preferred "four cheeses" pizzas.
- 7 Elsewhere, Indian researchers won the engineering prize for building a **shoe rack** that stopped trainers from being **smelly**. The rack contained a lamp that killed the bacteria in minutes. It also burnt the trainers. The psychology prize went to work that found people who were told they were intelligent, believed it, and then started **bragging** about it.
- 8 Dr Tomoki Kojima at the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization in Japan won the biology prize. His team showed that cows got fewer insect bites when they were painted with black stripes. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "I thought I was dreaming."
- 9 The literature prize went **posthumously** to the late Dr William Bean of the University of Iowa. In his papers, he measured the growth of his fingernails and toenails over 35 years. His son Bennett said the whole family got involved.
- 10 "He was interested in the world, and we were part of it," his son Bennett told the Guardian. "He would have loved this and used it as an event to write some perfect acceptance speech. He would say: 'Finally, **recognition!**'"

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and answer the questions.

1. What unusual ingredient did researchers suggest could help reduce people's weight?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What did the research about alcohol and foreign languages show?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What happened to babies when their mothers ate garlic?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How did Japanese researchers reduce the number of insect bites on cows?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What problem did the Indian engineering team's shoe rack have?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What did Dr William Bean measure for 35 years?

\_\_\_\_\_

#### 4 Key language

a. Find these phrases in the article. Then match them to the correct definitions.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. battled to       | a. changed in form or character into something else                 |
| 2. confused with    | b. tried hard to achieve something, often with difficulty           |
| 3. disguised as     | c. mistakenly believed that one thing is the same as something else |
| 4. transformed into | d. when two or more things are difficult to separate                |
| 5. sticks together  | e. made to look like something else to trick or fool people         |

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**b. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the phrases from the previous activity.**

1. Alligators are often \_\_\_\_\_ crocodiles because they look similar.
2. Vets \_\_\_\_\_ save the horse after it broke its leg in an accident.
3. The police officer was \_\_\_\_\_ as a taxi driver in the undercover operation.
4. Many old buildings in the city have been \_\_\_\_\_ luxury apartments.
5. When I cook spaghetti, it always \_\_\_\_\_—I think I cook it for too long.

### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these questions.**

- Which research mentioned in the article do you think is the most interesting and why?
- What would you research to win an Ig Nobel prize?

### 6 In your own words

**a. Work in pairs to research other awards that celebrate unusual or quirky things (e.g. the Golden Raspberry awards for the worst films, or the Pluto award for the most boring or pointless tourist attractions). Gather information on the following things:**

- when and why they created the award
- who organises it
- how they choose the winners
- one or two memorable winners and what they won the award for

**b. Prepare a presentation and present it to your classmates. Then decide as a class which award you like best.**