TRANSCRIPT · EPISODE 198

Why Do Fingers Wrinkle in Water? | Curious English

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

49 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, look at your fingertips after that swim.

They look like tiny road maps.

Why do our fingers wrinkle in water?

Welcome to Curious English from Your English Toolbox.

Make a guess before we explore the evidence.

Do fingertips simply soak up water like a sponge?

That is the familiar explanation, but it is not the whole story.

The wrinkling is linked to changes controlled by the nervous system.

Researchers can observe wrinkling after a person's fingers stay in water for a while.

It is not exactly the same as skin swelling everywhere.

One question is whether the wrinkles help us grip wet objects.

Grip means hold something firmly.

A study found that people handled submerged objects more quickly with wrinkled fingers.

The researchers suggested the grooves might help move water away from the skin.

A later study looked at the force needed to hold wet objects.

It found that wrinkling may make grip more efficient in watery conditions.

That sounds like evidence for a useful effect.

But does it prove that fingers evolved for this exact reason?

No, that explanation is still a hypothesis.

A hypothesis is an idea that can be tested, not a settled fact.

We should separate what a study observed from what scientists think it might mean.

This pattern may help us handle wet things.

May help is careful language.

It shows possibility, not certainty.

Another useful phrase is the evidence suggests.

The evidence suggests that wrinkles can improve handling in some tasks.

And researchers have not proved the evolutionary explanation.

We should be careful about how strongly we describe the research.

One study observed that people moved submerged objects faster with wrinkled fingers.

A later study tested how efficiently people gripped wet objects.

These results point in a similar direction, but they do not answer every question.

For example, they do not prove that the wrinkles evolved for this purpose.

This is a useful way to talk about science.

Researchers observed an effect.

They suggested one possible explanation.

More evidence is needed before we treat that explanation as certain.

Let us review.

Grip means hold firmly.

A hypothesis is an idea to test.

The evidence suggests something, but does not always prove it.

Your turn.

If research supports a possibility but does not prove it, what careful phrase can you use?

The evidence suggests.

In science, separate what researchers observe from what they think may explain it.

“The evidence suggests” is careful language when a result supports an idea but does not prove it.

Listen again at any of the seven speeds on the episode page, from extra slow to super fast.

Choose the speed that helps you follow each step of the explanation.

The link is in the description.

Stay curious, and keep asking good questions.