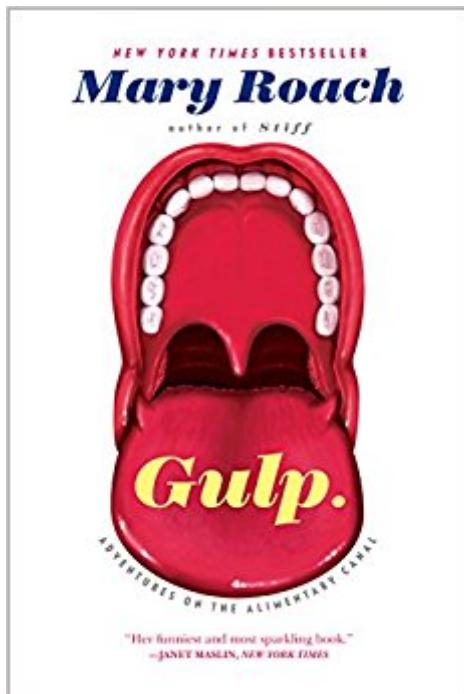


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Gulp: Adventures On The Alimentary Canal



Synopsis

The irresistible, ever-curious, and always best-selling Mary Roach returns with a new adventure to the invisible realm we carry around inside. "America's funniest science writer" (Washington Post) takes us down the hatch on an unforgettable tour. The alimentary canal is classic Mary Roach terrain: the questions explored in Gulp are as taboo, in their way, as the cadavers in *Stiff* and every bit as surreal as the universe of zero gravity explored in *Packing for Mars*. Why is crunchy food so appealing? Why is it so hard to find words for flavors and smells? Why doesn't the stomach digest itself? How much can you eat before your stomach bursts? Can constipation kill you? Did it kill Elvis? In *Gulp* we meet scientists who tackle the questions no one else thinks of—or has the courage to ask. We go on location to a pet-food taste-test lab, a fecal transplant, and into a live stomach to observe the fate of a meal. With Roach at our side, we travel the world, meeting murderers and mad scientists, Eskimos and exorcists (who have occasionally administered holy water rectally), rabbis and terrorists—who, it turns out, for practical reasons do not conceal bombs in their digestive tracts. Like all of Roach's books, *Gulp* is as much about human beings as it is about human bodies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mary Roach is one of my favorite science writers and I always buy her books and read them when they first come out. This book - *Gulp* - is all about the alimentary canal; that part of the body that begins at the point where food is consumed and ends where solid waste is expelled. Starting with taste and the mouth, she follows our digestive system all the way down. As with her other books, this one is replete with interesting and often bizarre facts and tales of eccentrics and misguided scientists and experiments gone awry. The author covers all sorts of "taboo" and sensitive subjects and both educates us and makes us laugh. At the start, we learn about the importance of our nose (our ability to smell) and what that has to do with taste. She also compares our tastebuds with those of cats and dogs - showing how we often assume that they will like what we will. Well, it turns out that's really wrong. We learn how different cultures throughout history have found different things palatable and that the foods consumed by the most privileged may not be the healthiest. She also goes on later on to compare the anatomy of man to those of various other animals and points out how we are the same and how we differ. We learn about the problems and benefits associated with our digestive system and the various theories and treatments over time for various intestinal ailments. In typical Mary Roach style, she candidly discusses such "taboo" topics as intestinal gas and our bowel habits. We read about the dangers of prisoners secreting contraband in their stomachs or their anal cavities and go from there to learning about the digestive systems of competitive eaters. We learn about the importance of saliva, all about acid reflux, and the various problems associated with indigestion among many, many other topics. We even learn why Elvis died, and yes it was on the toilet. We even hear a theory why people believed in dragons; and yes it has to do reptiles with gas and combustion. We find out why we don't digest our own stomachs (well, while we're alive) and whether or not animals other than parasites can survive being swallowed and even forcibly make their way out. It's difficult to give a fair summary to this book because it covers so much. This may be favorite book of hers since *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, and like that book this book will literally have you laughing out loud. For example, in trying to avoid the embarrassment of releasing intestinal gas, she writes: "Or perhaps to take the advice of a gastroenterologist I know: get a dog. (To blame.)" As a person who has GERD (acid reflux) and has spent time in the hospital for an episode of intestinal blockage (worst pain, ever), I was especially interested in this topic. But I think it's really something that would interest everyone. You will learn a lot and you will laugh a lot and you will end up wanting to make friends with this

author because she is so amusing and so personable. Highly recommended. You just have to read the first few pages to see if this is something you would enjoy. I read this in one sitting; it was not only entertaining but I'm smarter for having read it.

Gulp. Adventures on The Alimentary Canal By Mary Roach Though author Roach was recently called "America's funniest science writer" (Washington Post) she is not a scientist and claims that she often times has to fake her way through interviews with the experts. This alone was enough of an endorsement to get my attention, yet I've read her work before and pretty much knew what I was in for. Or did I? Though author Roach starts off with a non-alimentary canal location (the nose) it's quickly explained that it is through the process of smell that we eat what we do, not necessarily because of how it tastes. Eighty to Ninety percent, to be exact. And on she travels, down our inner tubing, splashing next into the stomach. Since mine is on the sensitive side, I paid close attention to this particular chapter, before moving on down. "...stomachs can digest themselves. Gastric acid and pepsin digest the cells of the stomach's protective layer quite effectively...the organ swiftly rebuilds what it breaks down. A healthy adult has a new stomach lining every three days." Food for thought indeed. The author offers tons of interesting facts, figures and things to consider, here are just a few; Laundry detergent is essentially a digestive tract in a box, fecal transplants can cure intractable C. diff infection, internal cleansings are very unhealthy, humans secrete two types of saliva--stimulated and un-stimulated and Elvis did not die of an overdose. I'm not telling, you'll have to read this baby to find out the truth. Over the years, as you can well imagine, many, in the name of science, came up with all sorts of reasons why and how the body digested food and ways to help the process along. Take Horace Fletcher, the nut-case who instigated a famous fad for extreme over-chewing called Fletcherizing. He suggested that the best and most efficient way to get the biggest buck from every bite was to chew one's food until it was completely liquefied. Talk about long lunches! Then author Roach researched the famous surgeon William Beaumont's case proving once and for all how little chewing is needed to digest most foods completely. It was done under rather unsavory conditions, but makes for some fascinating after-lunch reading. Trust me, read it after. She also delves into stuffing yourself for a living, using the lower intestine to transport items, nose-picking frequency and the history of flatulence research (you won't believe the ending). "If things go as they should, the bacteria hysteria so lucratively nurtured by the likes of Purell and Lysol will begin to subside." According to Roach, Bacteria is what keeps our system literally chugging along, without it, well, things that should move on and out (think grown children) can turn into all sorts of discomforts. She does hop around a great deal and touches on pet food science for some

bizarre reason, but overall this is a hilarious as well as informing read. "Most of us pass our lives never once laying eyes on our organs, the most precious and amazing things we own. Until something goes wrong, we barely give them thought." This book will give you much to chew on.

I was disappointed in this book. I love the other Mary Roach books that I have read- she is so funny and the books are really interesting and educational but this one was really hard to stomach (yes- a bad pun!) I felt like she could have written this book in about half the amount of pages. Some parts she just went on and on and it felt like she was just trying to fill the pages. It wasn't all bad. There were some funny parts and I learned a couple of things but I just felt like she just didn't have enough information to write a whole book about the alimentary canal. If you've read her other books and are curious about this one- its not a total waste of time but this is definitely not one of her best books.

If you're into gastronomical wonders, food, humor, and science, this is your book. This was my first Mary Roach and I just love her non-fiction story telling. Yes the cover is provocative, and will draw the attention of strangers. You'll learn something new about digestion, even though this is a topic that seems to be all over the media. I found this book to be a great indulgence and wonderful curiosity. Get it. Read it, if only to offer you something interesting to talk about on the plane, train, or at bland dinner parties.

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