

### Peculiar Patents

To gain a United States patent, the inventor must prepare an application that proves they have conceived of something original, not obvious, and not a naturally occurring event (like wind). But the patent office doesn't judge the marketability of a patent or whether it is a good idea, which leads to some very... original inventions.

#### Tips for the Activity

- Print [patent drawings](#) you think will appeal to participants.
- Use [Google Patent](#) on a laptop or other device to look up patents people are interested in. Besides searching by name, you can look up patents by state, country, or company. Plants are also included. Try looking up roses or blueberries, for example.
- Get a copy of [Patently Silly by Daniel Wright](#). The softcover book is full of weird and wacky patents with drawings and commentary. Read aloud a few of the featured inventions in *Patently Silly*.
- Read aloud the descriptions of some of the peculiar patents we found. Read aloud [Science Puns and Jokes](#).
- If someone in the group has ever thought of an invention or sought a patent, ask them to describe their invention and the patent process.



---

### Peculiar Patents

#### Animal Track Footwear Soles, 1962

How do you teach rangers and Boy Scouts to track animals, especially if they live in an urban setting? Run around in shoes with animal prints embedded in the soles! Leave deer, raccoon, or even bear tracks for others to follow. It's fun to see people's reactions when they realize what they thought was a four-legged animal seems to be taking strides on two legs. Fellow nature lovers may also be perplexed by these animals' unnatural tendency to stick to the trail.

#### Helium-filled Sunshades, 1991

What to do when you're backpacking and the sun is beating down on you? Grab your super lightweight, portable sunshade. You can easily pack it in your backpack. Let's hope, of course, that there happens to be a helium tank along the side of the trail, or else you'll also need to carry a bulky extra 50 pounds or so. The sunshade might be more expensive than sunscreen and not protect the skin as well, but being in the shade feels so good when you're overheated from lugging the helium tank around. Be careful of strong winds!

## **Barrier Device for Children, 1992**

Siblings often tussle, especially when bored or on a long car ride. This seating barrier keeps kids from fighting. The flexible barrier is attached to a sheet. When kids sit on the sheet, the barrier becomes more rigid. Unfortunately, it appears that most kids could reach over it easily. It also seems a lot like a firm foam cushion. Perhaps a version that issued a mild shock if touched would be more effective. Disclaimer: Using the barrier is not guaranteed to, as the photo suggests, compel your children to read or quietly look away from the other child.

## **Substance Dispensing Headgear, 1998**

This food-grade plastic barrel is meant to be filled with the liquid “substance” of your choice and then worn on your head. It’s a little bulky to fit in most cars, so it’s perhaps geared toward people who like walking or riding a bicycle. (Perhaps their drivers’ licenses were taken away due to liquid substance consumption?) The inventor mentioned that one of the most significant benefits of his invention was keeping the hands free. However, it doesn’t seem like your own hands would be able to reach the dispenser very easily. Fraternities might consider investing.

## **The Device for Waking Persons from Sleep, 1882; Anti-eating Face Mask, 1982**

The Device for Waking Persons from Sleep and Anti-Eating Face Mask patents were granted 100 years apart, showing how little patent drawings changed. The first, from 1882, features an alarm clock that doesn’t rely on sound. The patent’s author noted that it’s easy to get used to bells or chimes and tune them out. But, if a bunch of little cork and wood plugs hit you on the head, you are sure not to oversleep. (It also might work because you’re too scared to fall asleep in the first place.)

The second is a face mask designed to discourage eating by forcing the user to unlock it before consuming anything. The hope is they reconsider during this time and are deterred from snacking. Of course, wearing this contraption in public would be a general deterrent to many things, like holding down a job and talking. Currently, people might mistake it for a very hardcore COVID mask.

## **Dog Dust Cover, 1964**

Don’t you hate it when your house is so dirty that your dog looks like a giant dust bunny? You have a couple of choices when this happens. You could clean your house, of course. Alternatively, you could pop your pup in a dust cover.

The dust cover could also be helpful if you plan to bring your dog to the desert or you and your dog get trapped near a fire or active volcano. Although, at that point, you probably aren’t all that concerned with a bit of dust. While this is not mentioned in the patent, pushing your dog around the house with the dust jacket on might be a less expensive alternative to a robot vacuum.

## ***Patently Silly***

These are a few of the many patents described in *Patently Silly* by Daniel Wright.

- Leg-shaped nutcracker
- Heart-shaped cheese slicer
- Combination lollipop/drinking straw

- Combined coconut-shaped drink container/coin bank
- Doggie poop freeze wand
- Cordless jump rope

## Science Puns and Jokes

- Optimists see a glass as half full.  
Pessimists see a glass as half empty.  
Scientists see a glass as completely full—half is liquid and half is air.
  - Why don't ants get sick?  
They have ant-y bodies.
  - What did one tectonic plate say to the other?  
Sorry! My fault.
  - What did the biologist wear to impress his date?  
Designer genes
  - What is a physicist's favorite part of a baseball game?  
The wave
  - What do you tell the person who invented the number 0?  
Thanks for nothing.
  - What's wrong when a physicist and a biologist enter a relationship?  
There's no chemistry.
  - According to chemistry, alcohol is a solution.
  - What award did the person who invented the door knocker win?  
The no-bell prize
  - What did the science book say to the math book?  
You've got problems.
  - Who invented fractions?  
Henry the 1/8
  - What should you do if no one laughs at these science jokes?  
Keep trying. Eventually, you'll get a reaction.
-









## **The Device of Waking Persons from Sleep, 1882**

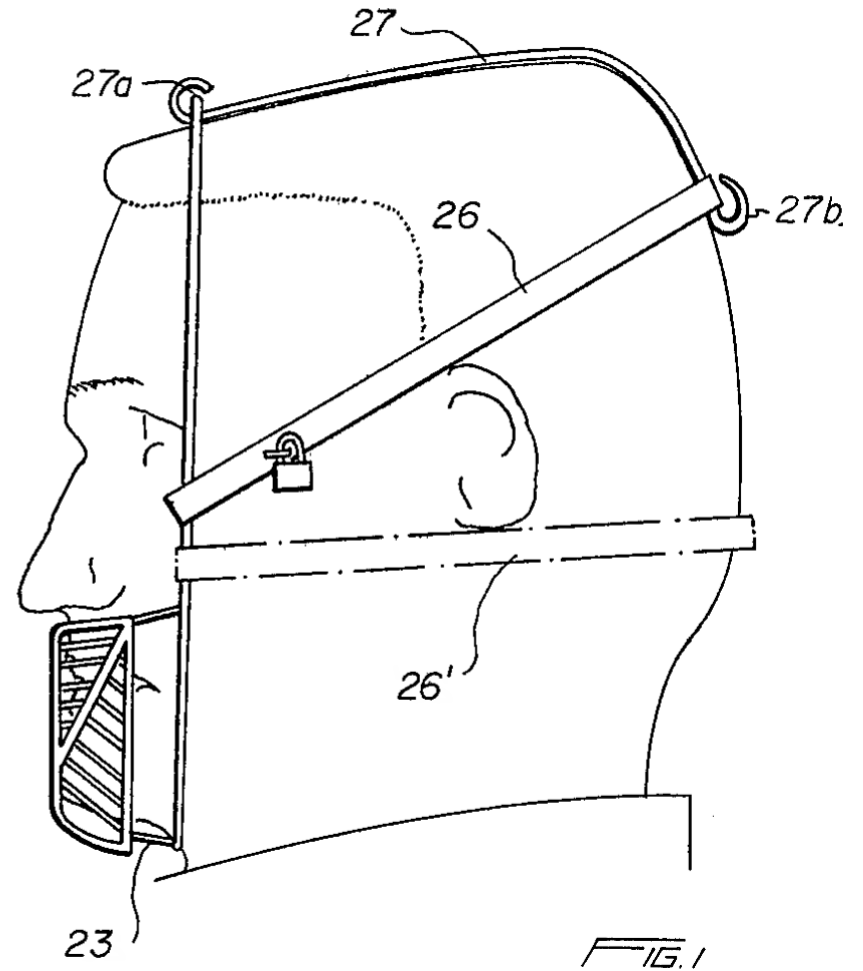
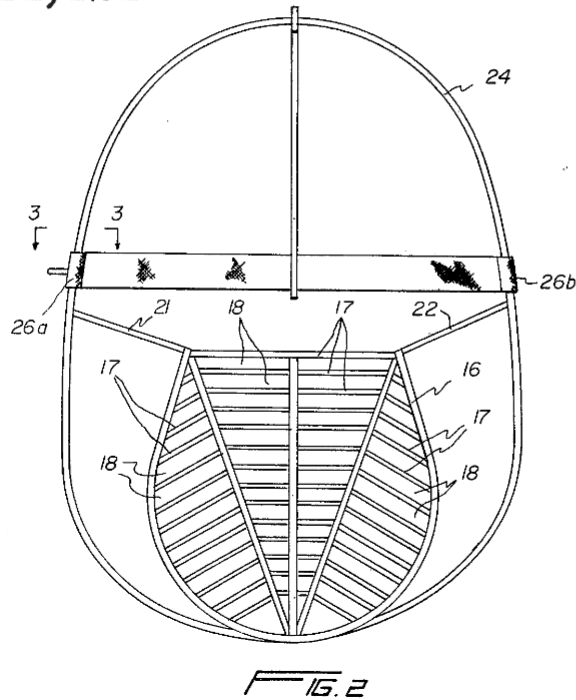


LUCY L. BARMBY

# ANTI-EATING FACE MASK

Patented August 17, 1982

No. 4,344,424



**Anti-eating Face Mask, 1982**

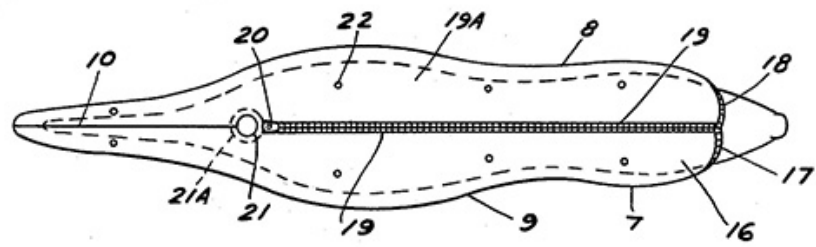


FIG. 2

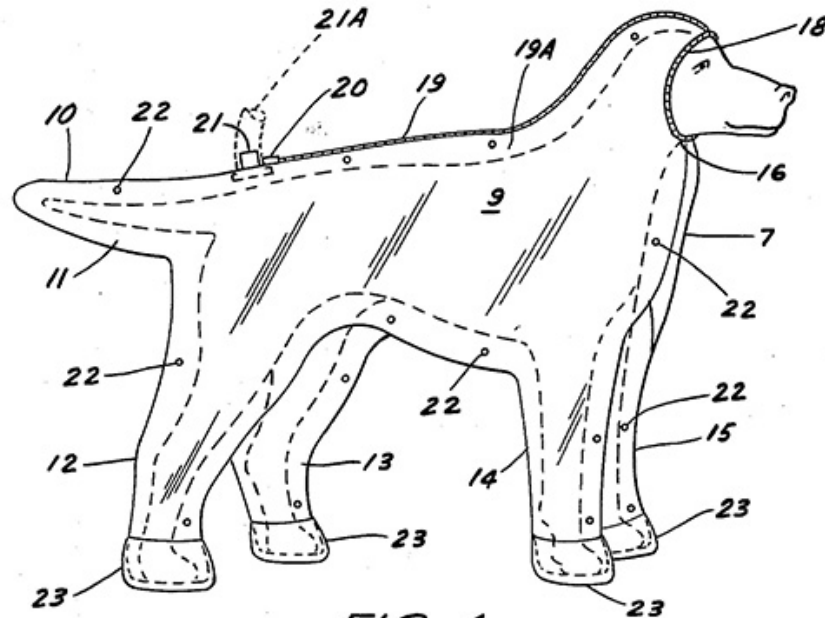


FIG. 1

## Dog Dust Cover, 1964