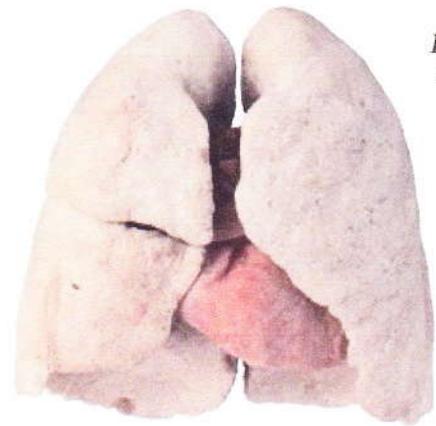
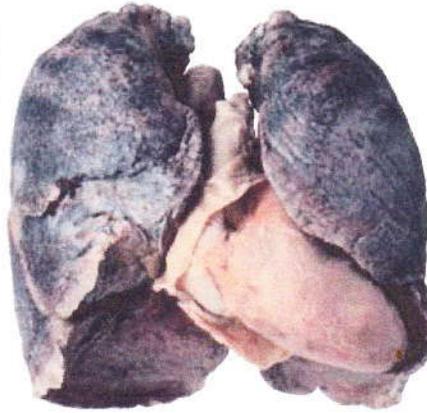


Viewing both a healthy lung (far right) and a smoker's lung (near right) at the *Body Worlds 3* exhibit could cause a tobacco-loving visitor to go cold turkey.



By Marie Sherlock

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WWW.BODYWORLDS.COM

Body Worlds 3 Gets Under Your Skin

All About OMSI's 'Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies'

The Skin Man, a plastinated cadaver holding his skin, greets visitors near the entrance to *Body Worlds 3*.

"Do you want to go see *Body Worlds*?" I ask my 15-year-old son. I proceed to describe OMSI's latest traveling exhibit to him, that it contains real bodies treated by a procedure called plastination (a vacuum process that removes fluids and replaces them with polymer, thereby halting decomposition and preserving the body). I suspect that my science-minded teen will jump at the chance to get "up close and personal" with actual human cadavers.

"It sounds sorta creepy," he replies, to my amazement.

"So you don't want to go?"

"Are you kidding? *Of course* I want to go!"

I think this exchange might just sum up how most of us – kids and adults alike – feel about this somewhat controversial exhibit. We are, on the one hand, "creeped out" by the idea. But we're also – dare I say it? – *morbidly* curious and intrigued by what we might discover. Kind of a "shock and awe" phenomenon.

Realizing I can't pass up on one of my teenagers *choosing* to spend time with me, the next day we find ourselves at OMSI. The very first plastinated specimen we encounter visually proclaims what we're about to see. It's a male cadaver holding its flayed skin in its right hand. Muscles, tendons, bones, ligaments, joints – all are visible.

As I write this, I realize that readers might conclude that my son's description of "creepy" seems an understatement right about now. And I'll admit that I was taken aback by that first display. But once I got over my unease, I found the amazement setting in. There may be an undercurrent of "creepiness" surrounding *Body Worlds 3*, but – at least for me – it only seemed to heighten the experience. I soon decide that the exhibit is much more "awe" than it is "shock."

If you've seen the billboards and ads, you might expect that *Body Worlds 3* would consist largely of dozens of those eerily exposed corpses. It certainly includes many and they are fascinating. Looking at what's literally under your skin, how it's all layered and comes together to become our remarkable human bodies is, indeed, awe-inspiring. More than

once I see my son study one of those figures and then peer at his own hand, foot or arm and I know what he's thinking, because I'm thinking the same thing: "So *that's* what's under my skin..."

But we soon find that we're even more mesmerized by the myriad body parts contained in the display cases. The more than 200 human specimens included in the exhibit are organized by systems of the body, starting with the locomotive system – think bones and muscle – and moving on to the nervous, respiratory, cardiovascular and digestive systems then to the urinary tract and reproductive organs. It's a master plan, really, starting with the more familiar body parts and moving on gradually to those more complex and mysterious organs.

For nearly every area of the body, there are examples of healthy – and unhealthy – organs. It's the contrast between those that is most illuminating. You'll see the utter destruction that smoking can cause to your lungs and the devastating impact of alcohol on your liver. You'll see kidneys with tumors, stomachs with ulcers and arteries that have hardened. You *will* think about what you've been eating (and drinking) and how your good or bad habits might be affecting these crucial parts of your body.

While visitors are not allowed to touch the bodies or organs, kids – and parents – can have a traditional OMSI "hands on" experience at the two "Ask the Expert" tables, manned by knowledgeable volunteers. At our stop at the first one, we hold a human kidney and liver. Once we get over that initial eeriness (again), we're engrossed in pondering the size, shape, color and texture of these human organs.

Informational banners chronicling the history of the study of anatomy are placed throughout the exhibition. I found these fascinating! Did you know that Leonardo da Vinci robbed graves to obtain his models – and then performed dissections of them? Or that, in 16th century Europe, the public was invited to "anatomy theaters" where they could watch autopsies of human bodies take place?

Two youngsters examine a "whole body plastinate" at the *Body Worlds 3* exhibition.



A Parent's Guide to *Body Worlds 3*

Parents will need to gauge both their own and their children's abilities to handle this exhibit. *Body Worlds 3* may be appropriate for children as young as 4 or 5, all depending upon their interests and temperaments. Due to the substantial amount of reading involved, children in third grade and older will likely get the most out of the exhibit.

OMSI recommends the exhibit for children ages 10 and up, although the exhibit is open to all ages. The museum asks that children under 12 be accompanied by an adult. OMSI further recommends the following when visiting the exhibit with a child:

- Relate elements of the exhibition to experiences in your child's life: "Did you know you use so many muscles when you play soccer?"
- Answer your child's questions honestly. It's okay not to know all the answers. Ask staff members and visit www.oms.edu for more information when you get home.
- Be sensitive to your own and your children's reactions. People come away from the exhibition with many different interpretations.

"Gross," was my teenager's one word summation of these practices. I have to agree on that one.

You'll need to remind yourself – over and over – that every cadaver and organ on display in *Body Worlds 3* is authentic. And it's in that moment of realization that you feel the full impact of the exhibit.

So is *Body Worlds 3* creepy? Maybe, just a little. But not so much that it kept this middle-aged mom and her teenager from spending several awe-filled and educational hours absorbing its lessons. We saw many younger kids too – a few preschoolers; more grade school age and up – and all seemed to be taking in the exhibit without incident. There was, indeed, an air of respect among all of the viewers.

That's not to say the exhibit is for all kids or, indeed, for all adults. I've spoken to several parents who are adamant that they don't want to see plastinated cadavers. You'll have to decide for yourself if it's right for you and your family. (See "A Parent's Guide to *Body Worlds 3*" on this page.)

As we exit the exhibit, I tell my son about school field trips to OMSI that I was part of as a kid, that the *piece de resistance* during those educational outings was "The Plastic Lady" – a state-of-the-art, anatomically correct adult female whose body parts lit up as a recorded voice explained what the viewers were seeing.

You've come a long way, OMSI.

Body Worlds 3 is on display at OMSI through Oct. 7. Tickets are timed and cost \$21 for adults (including museum admission), \$15 for ages 3 to 18 (service charges may apply). 9 am to 9 pm daily. 1945 SE Water Ave. 503-797-4486. www.oms.edu. www.bodyworlds.com.

Marie Sherlock is the editor of *Metro Parent*.

OMSI's Anatomical Exhibition continues on page 36

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