

# Hibernating Alaska bears boring on video but thrill scientists anyway

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Using manmade dens tricked out like a reality-show set, Alaska scientists videotaped and monitored five black bears through a winter's hibernation and made some startling observations. Somehow the bears maintained their muscle tone and bone mass through months of little activity, **The Washington Post reports**. They've "tricked" their bodies into thinking they're still doing work, say the scientists from the **Institute of Arctic Biology** at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

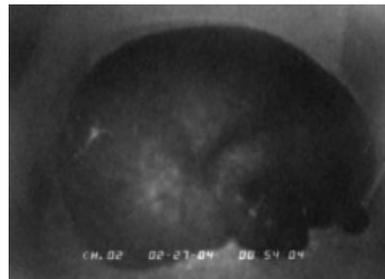
*It turns out that Ursus americanus hibernates in a manner unlike that of the dozens of other hibernating mammals. ... Unlike other hibernators such as squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons and skunks, the bears maintained a high body temperature throughout five months of inactivity.*

*Further, when the bears emerged in mid-April, the researchers got another surprise. Like a fuzzy-headed human waking from a Sunday snooze, the bears stayed groggy, with their metabolic rate remaining at about half that of summer levels for two to three weeks. ...*

*[Institute director Brian] Barnes said the study, unveiled Thursday at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, marks the first time anyone has monitored black bears continuously throughout hibernation in a natural setting. ...*

*Barnes said his team is now trying to understand the biological tricks the bears employ to lower their metabolism so dramatically.*

*Doing so could one day aid patients with strokes and serious injuries, he said.*



enlarge  
Institute of Arctic Biology  
One of five hibernating bears in the UAF study.

## Alaska Newsreader

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*"If we can uncover the way hibernators turn down their demand for oxygen, you can imagine developing a therapy . . . to put someone in stasis, a protected state," Barnes said. "That would give you more time. It would expand the 'golden hour' where it's critical to reach medical care to a golden day or a golden week."*

The five bears, identified as problem bears in the Fairbanks area before the study, were killed after the study so tissue samples could be studied.

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Read more in [The Washington Post](#). The article also includes a [graphic](#) and [video](#) in which a hibernating bear can be heard snoring. See another article at [National Geographic](#) and a [Q&A](#) with one of the

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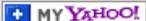


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