

You Snooze, You ... Don't Lose?

Bears don't technically hibernate.

That may come as a shock, since bears are often the poster children for hibernation. But true hibernation is an extreme, low-energy state that some animals enter during long winter months, when body temperature drops near freezing and metabolism to under 5 percent of normal. Emerging from hibernation takes time.

Bears, on the other hand, enter a state called *torpor*, which is more like an involuntary deep sleep with a more moderate drop in body temperature and heart rate. It enables bears to wake up quickly in case of an emergency—or to give birth, which mama bears do in their winter dens! Newborn cubs weigh about 1 pound. They rely completely on their mother's rich milk until they emerge from the den three to four months later, weighing 11 to 15 pounds.

Alaska's biggest coastal brown bears can grow to 9 feet tall and weigh up to 1,500 pounds—and in preparation for six to eight months of torpor, they can eat up to 90 pounds of food *every day*.

(That's a lot of salmon.)

During torpor, brown bears lose up to 40 percent of their weight while they stop eating and drinking. They also stop eliminating waste for months at a time. Incredibly, God gave bears the ability to recycle their waste during torpor, producing protein that keeps their muscles and bones from deteriorating during their months of inactivity.

Pictured: brown bear (*Ursus arctos*)



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