

A young chimpanzee with dark black fur and a light-colored face is hanging from a thin green vine. The chimpanzee is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dense, out-of-focus green forest.

BY CHIKU CHIMPANZEE,
AS TOLD TO ELIZABETH SCHLEICHERT
PHOTOS BY SUZI ESZTERHAS

CHIMPS Are Champs

Hi!
I'm Chiku,
the chimpanzee.
We chimps are champs
at climbing trees—and
much, much more.
Keep reading and
you'll see.

Lucky me! I live in a big, beautiful African rainforest! I hang out here with my mom and my older sisters. From time to time, other family members and friends join us. Sometimes we gather in trees, and other times on the forest floor. Either way, we have a great time, eating and relaxing together. We chimps are champs at chillin'.

We're winners at all kinds of play, too. Little chimps, for instance, like to roughhouse, wrestle, poke, and grab each other. We also do somersaults and spin round and round. Sometimes we laugh a lot—making chuffing or panting sounds. Other times, we play with pieces of bark or small

Below, my family huddles close for comfort. My big brother and sister watch as my goofy cousins scramble up a tree, poking each other all the way (right).



branches, inventing games with these “toys.” Like your younger brother or sister, we may carry some of our toys around with us everywhere we go.

SNACK SNAGGERS

We chimps are totally awesome at tracking down meals. The grownups in our family may spend six hours a day tromping through the underbrush or swinging through the treetops to find good eats. But find them, they

As you can see below, our feet wrap easily around branches. That comes in really handy when Mom and I head up into the trees. I play while she looks for lunch.



do. Favorites are fruits, especially ripe figs. Mom also goes for green leaves and stems. I'm still nursing, so she just gives me little tastes of these treats every now and then.

Chimps also chomp on such things as seeds, blossoms, bark, bird eggs, ants, termites, and sometimes even small monkeys. So you see, we're hardly

picky eaters. If you invited us for supper, we'd probably clean our plates in no time—and then ask for seconds!

UP THERE—WHERE?

Trees can be great places to grab a bite. But that's not all. They're also perfect spots for snoozing. Every night, we chimps build nests of branches and leaves up in the trees. Then we settle in to catch some zzz's.

Best of all, trees are our very own jungle gyms. Right now, I'm just getting the hang of moving hand over hand through the canopy. But I'll soon be going a little ape, swinging and leaping crazily through the branches like a real acrobat!





The chimp above pant-hoots to announce the arrival of strangers. At right, two brothers groom each other.

Chimps are natural champs at these high-jinks. That's because we have super-strong shoulders and extra-long, flexible arms. (A chimp's arms can reach the full height of a grown man.) Our thumbs also help us grip branches. So, all in all, life in the trees is easy.

GREAT TALKERS

We chimps are amazing when it comes to communicating with each other. You should hear all the sounds we make. Like you, for example, we sometimes cry and whimper. And when excited, we let out a *pant-hoot*. That's a loud, ear-splitting call that can carry about a mile through the



That's me above, in a quiet moment with Mom. Holding her hand makes me feel safe and peaceful.

rainforest. Each chimp's pant-hoot is different. So we may not see who's calling, but we can usually tell who it is!

KEEPING CLOSE

We show our feelings by touching each other. For example, when we've been away from our friends for a while, we greet them with hugs and kisses—as you may do!

And two chimps often strengthen the friendly ties between them with another kind of touching called *grooming*. That's when the chimps take turns picking dirt and pests out of each other's hair.

GIVING COMFORT

Like you, chimps often turn to others for support. A nervous chimp may grab hold of a buddy. In fact, older chimps may each have as many as five close pals. The friends reach out to one another when they're stressed. They also eat, travel, rest, and sleep near each other.

Of course, when little chimps like me are afraid, we turn to our mothers. After all, who's better at making us feel that everything is all right?

GOOD LOOKERS

The expressions on our faces also tell other chimps how we're feeling. That's why chimps in a group constantly "read" how everyone looks to check out their moods. As you can see from the diagram below, our faces reveal many different emotions.

Read My Face!

Playful



Angry

Afraid



Surrendering





Mom's back makes a great napping spot (above). Later, she and I play together (right).



FREE RIDERS

I think my mom is the champ of all chimp mothers! She nurses me, keeps an eye on me, and showers me with lots of affection. She also makes sure I'm learning all I'll need to know when I'm grown up.

And if I'm not by her side, I'm almost always going along for the ride! Like all grown chimps, Mom walks on all fours, leaning on her knuckles. (Some people call chimps "knuckle-walkers.") But when she sets off somewhere, I don't walk—I hop aboard my mother!

And take it from me, it's a fun way to travel. When I was really little, I clung to Mom's chest. But now that I'm a year old, I perch on her back like a jockey. Up

here, I can take in all the sights. It's relaxing, too. I often fall asleep to the gentle rhythm of Mom's walking.

PLAYMATES

Chimp mothers seem to know the best ways to play with their babies. Here's how it usually happens with me and my mom: She'll be grooming me, and I'll start acting silly. Then, before I know it, she's tickling me. Soon, we're into one big, squirmy-wormy, ticklefest! I'm giggling now, just thinking about it.

Bet you wish you could be a fun-loving champ of a chimp like me. Well, what's stopping you? Go on—climb a tree, tickle a friend, give a hug. Oh, and don't forget to laugh a lot!



Rangers: Recently, scientists have discovered all sorts of amazing things about chimps. To find out more, visit nwf.org/rangerrick online.

We thank Richard Wrangham, Curator of Primate Behavioral Biology at Harvard University, for his help with this article. —R.R.