

## Why Am I Taller? What Happens to an Astronaut's Body in Space

**Dave Williams**

**Elizabeth Howell**

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Dave Williams and Elizabeth Howell's *Why Am I Taller?* covers the medical side of an astronaut's life.

Physician astronauts, like Williams, have a unique window into what it's like to be in space. They both experience and diagnose illnesses and bodily changes that are distinctive to space travel. The book shows the disorientation that occurs at every stage of going to space: astronauts may have swelling when they arrive, their legs may thin out over time, and they have trouble walking and balancing when they return to Earth. These firsthand insights are shared alongside scientific explanations of the common effects of space on the human body.

Each chapter focuses on particular issues, including fainting due to heart or blood pressure changes, maintaining balanced nutrition, and the proper care of fingernails. While there are fascinating tidbits throughout, the heart of the book is found in its in-depth explorations of medical topics. And the book is holistic in its focus, also discussing mental health in space and what happens when astronauts are driven to work like machines, not human beings.

This work is driven by curiosity—the same characteristic that drives people to explore space in the first place. It includes emerging research on how immune cells behave in space, as well as alluring questions about what will happen when astronauts travel to Mars. Anecdotes from space flights and astronauts augment Williams's firsthand experience, including Neil Armstrong's experiences with *Gemini 8* and from recent stents on the International Space Station. These research findings are intriguing and accessible, vivified by an undercurrent of energy and excitement.

*Why Am I Taller?* is a fascinating science text about the effects of space travel on the human body.

MELISSA WUSKE (November / December 2022)

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