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HEALTH NEWS

The Hamilton Spectator

(Feb 11, 2010)

MS initial study results support Zamboni theory

University of Buffalo researchers say a preliminary study shows that 55 per cent of people with MS had narrowing of the veins that control blood flow from the brain, compared to 26 per cent of healthy control subjects.

When the researchers excluded 10.2 per cent of subjects whose results were considered borderline, the proportion of MS patients with the anomaly rose to 62.5 per cent.

The research is testing a theory by Italian vascular surgeon Dr. Paolo Zamboni that restricted blood flow could injure brain tissue and lead to the symptoms of MS.

This week in Hamilton, Zamboni urged doctors to be more open to his ideas during a conference at St. Joseph's Hospital -- his first North American appearance since his theory of "chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency" gained worldwide attention in the fall.

The Buffalo study involving 500 people is the first step in determining if chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, is a major risk factor for MS.

Lead investigator Dr. Robert Zivadinov says he is cautiously optimistic and should have more definitive results after 500 more subjects are examined using advanced diagnostic tools.

Gene mutations may cause some stuttering

For the first time, scientists have found genes that could explain some cases of stuttering.

"In terms of myth busters, this is really an important step forward," said Jane Fraser, president of the Stuttering Foundation in the U.S.

Researchers taking part in a U.S. government-funded study discovered mutations in three genes that appear to cause the speech problem in some people.

Stuttering tends to run in families, and previous research suggested a genetic connection. But until now, researchers had not been able to pinpoint any culprit genes.

Dennis Drayna, a geneticist and senior author of the study, said he hopes the results help convince doubters that stuttering "is almost certainly a biological problem."

The research -- released yesterday by the New England Journal of Medicine -- points to a possible enzyme treatment for stuttering someday.

The researchers estimate the three gene variants account for 9 per cent of all stuttering cases. But they are looking for other stuttering genes.

In fact, between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of stuttering cases are thought to have a genetic component, Drayna said.

"The task of connecting the dots between genes and stuttering is just beginning," Simon E. Fisher of England's Oxford University wrote in an accompanying editorial.

Canadians eating fewer homemade meals

At least one dietitian is not surprised at a new report showing Canadians are moving away from homemade meals in favour of convenient prepackaged meals that are less nutritious.

The report by NPD Group shows Canadian households consumed 5 per cent fewer homemade meals last year over 2008. Over the past six years, there was a drop of 10 per cent.

Halifax-based dietitian Tristaca Caldwell says convenience tends to trump nutrition for busy families.

Caldwell favours frozen chicken breasts, however she warns you lose out on nutrition with processed foods such as frozen chicken strips or chicken burger.

But the report also suggests about 85 per cent of consumers are shunning sodium, saturated fats and trans fats, and they are watching for foods with fibre, antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids.

Mother's age increases risk of autistic baby

A study says a woman's chances of having a child with autism increases as she ages.

University of California-Davis researcher Janie Shelton says that although the father's age can contribute, that risk is overwhelmed by the mother's age.

Mothers over 40 were about 50 per cent more likely to have autistic children than those in their 20s. The risk for fathers older than 40 was 36 per cent higher than for men in their 20s. Still, the risk of a woman over 40 having an autistic child is less than four in 1,000.

-- Compiled by Florence Sicoli from Hamilton Spectator news services

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