



All the News That's Fit



Wellnews: Good news and bad news

By [Scott LaFee](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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People who have Alzheimer's disease may be less likely to develop cancer, and people who have cancer may be less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, according to a new study published in the journal *Neurology*.

Researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis looked at a group of 3,020 people 65 and older who were involved in a cardiovascular study. They followed them for an average of five years to see whether they developed dementia and for an average of eight years to see whether they developed cancer. At the beginning of the study, 164 people already had Alzheimer's and 522 already had a cancer diagnosis.

During the study, 478 people developed dementia and 376 developed invasive cancer. For people who had Alzheimer's at the start of the study, the risk of future cancer hospitalization was reduced by 69 percent compared with those who did not have Alzheimer's at the beginning of the study. For Caucasian people who had cancer at the start, their risk of developing Alzheimer's was reduced 43 percent compared with those without cancer at the start.

The next step, said scientists, is the obvious one: "Discovering the links between these two conditions may help us better understand both diseases and open up avenues for possible treatments," said Catherine Roe, one of the study's authors.

Dr. Tarantula

A protein in tarantula venom may have promise as a potential therapy for muscular dystrophy.

Researchers at the University of Buffalo have discovered a peptide in the spider's venom that, injected in mice with MD, increased muscle strength without negative side effects. The peptide, called GsMTx4, also has potential for treating other conditions such as neuropathic pain (pain originating in nerve fibers) and atrial fibrillation (cardiac arrhythmia).

A small, Buffalo, N.Y.-based biotech company called Rose Pharmaceuticals is pursuing development of the peptide/drug. The name of the company derives from a pet tarantula owned by one of the company's founders.

Get me that. Stat!

Only 8.5 percent of Finns fear that those who laugh near them are laughing at them, as opposed to 80 percent of Thais, according to a Spanish study of 93 countries. The Finns and Thais represented the ends of the spectrum.

Medtronica

Eat well guide: eatwellguide.org

Plug in your ZIP code, city or key words, and this easy-to-use guide will find sources of locally grown healthy foods, everything from bakers and farmers markets to restaurants and caterers. There are also links to relevant news articles and recipes.

Phobia of the week

Gelotophobia — fear of being laughed at

Meet germ

Q-fever is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*, first described in 1935. Transmission from infected animals to humans is usually airborne, but can occur through ingested products such as unpasteurized milk. Ticks are the primary vector among animals. The typical symptoms of Q-fever are fever with headache, chills, muscle and joint pains, light sensitivity and diarrhea. It's usually an occupational illness, affecting people who work closely with domesticated animals: farmers, vets and slaughterhouse workers. Antibiotics work in most cases. There is no vaccine.

Observation

I smoke cigars because at my age if I don't have something to hang onto I might fall down.

— *Comedian George Burns, who died in 1996 at the age of 100*

Medical history

This week in 1949, the first photograph of genes was taken at the University of Southern California by Daniel Chapin Pease and Richard Freligh Baker. This week in 1971, University of California Berkeley chemists announced the first synthetic production of growth hormones.

Best medicine

Patient: Doctor, my stomach is getting awfully big.

Doctor: You should diet.

Patient: Really? What color?

Curtain calls

Between 1766 and 1910, "nostalgia" was listed as the official cause on the death certificates of 31,987

Americans, who reportedly passed away from missing loved ones, their home or prolonged melancholy. Though there's no way to know what the actual causes of death were, it seems likely that depression was a primary culprit, weakening the immune system and allowing greater susceptibility to disease.

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