Dyslexia Hits Different Brain Areas in English-, Chinese-Speaking Children

The areas of the brain affected by dyslexia differ between children who learned to read in English and those who learned to read in Chinese, say researchers who compared MRI brain scans of children, the Associated Press reported.

"This finding was very surprising to us. We had not ever thought that dyslexics' brains are different for children who read in English and Chinese. Our finding yields neurobiological clues to the cause of dyslexia," said study lead author Li-Hai Tan, a professor of linguistics and brain and cognitive sciences at the University of Hong Kong.

The study was published Monday in the online edition of the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Children who learn English and other alphabetical languages learn the sounds of letters and how to combine them into words, while Chinese children memorize hundreds of symbols that represent words, Guinevere F. Eden, director of the Center for the Study of Learning at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., told the AP.

This finding shows that "we cannot just assume that any dyslexic child is going to be helped by the same kind of intervention," said Eden, who was not involved in the study.

-----

Pfizer Halts Melanoma Drug Trial

A late-stage study of the experimental melanoma treatment tremelimumab has been halted by drug maker Pfizer Inc., after a data review showed the drug was no more effective than standard chemotherapy.

Even though the trial has been stopped, study investigators will work with patients to determine if they're benefiting from treatment and should continue taking tremelimumab, the Associated Press reported.

All the data from the study is being analyzed, and more details about the results are expected to be available at June's annual meeting of the American Society for Clinical Oncology, in Chicago.

"We continue to focus on additional studies involving tremelimumab alone and in combination with other therapies which are currently ongoing in patients with several types of cancer," said Charles Baum, vice president and oncology therapeutic area head at Pfizer Global Research and Development, the AP reported.

Baum also said Pfizer "will continue to assess the study data to understand the clinical benefit seen in some patients who received tremelimumab."

-----

Deadliest Form of Skin Cancer Largely Unknown

Merkel cell carcinoma -- the deadliest form of skin cancer -- hasn't received much scientific scrutiny, and most people probably haven't heard of it, according to the Associated Press.

Funding is a major issue. Researchers investigating the disease have long had to rely on small pilot grants and family fund-raising.

It's only been about 15 years since Merkel cell carcinoma was recognized as distinct from melanoma. Since then, the number of diagnosed cases in the United States has tripled to about 1,500 a year. Merkel cell carcinoma is more aggressive than melanoma and requires different treatment -- intense radiation.

Last month, the first comprehensive report on Merkel cell carcinoma symptoms and risk factors was published. The disease almost exclusively develops on sun-exposed skin on Caucasians over age 50, the AP reported.

In January, University of Pittsburgh scientists announced they'd identified a possible cancer-triggering virus inside Merkel cell tumors.

-----

Hispanic Toddlers at Greater Risk of Iron Deficiency

Hispanic toddlers have double the rate of iron deficiency as white toddlers, concludes a new study published in the
In analyzing iron deficiency data from 1976-2002, researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center found that overweight toddlers also were at greater-than-average risk.

Over the span, iron deficiency rates dropped among some groups, from 23 percent to 12 percent in 1-year-old children, from 22 percent to 9 percent among poor toddlers, and from 16 percent to 6 percent in black toddlers, the school said in a prepared statement.

The researchers attributed the decreases to ongoing efforts to fortify infant formula and foods with iron, and to the federal Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. They recommended stepped-up efforts to provide nutrition education at clinics and community outreach programs, and that all overweight toddlers be screened for iron deficiency.

Lack of dietary iron can lead to iron-deficiency anemia, where the body does not have enough iron to form sufficient hemoglobin, a blood protein that carries oxygen to the body's cells.

2 Mad Cow Deaths Reported in Spain
Two people in Spain have died from the human variant of mad cow disease, Spanish officials reported Monday.

The two deaths from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease occurred in Spain's Castilla-Leon region in December and February. The victims, aged 40 and 51, represent the nation's first deaths from the brain-wasting illness since 2005, the Associated Press reported.

A health official from the region, north of Madrid, told the wire service that the victims apparently contracted the disease before 2001. Preventive guidelines on livestock and meat production are considerably stricter now, the official said.

Mad cow, first reported in Britain in the 1980s, has been attributed to the use of recycled meat and bone meal in cattle feed. The human variant appears to be acquired by eating meat from infected animals.

Unidentified officials in Spain, appealing for calm, insisted that it was safe to eat domestic beef, the AP said.

Stuffed Insect Toys Recalled for Choking Hazard
Some 300,000 "Cuddly Cousins" plush insect toys are being recalled because they contain small parts that could pose a choking hazard to small children, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said Monday.

The toys, made in China, were available in six designs: a lady bug, bumble bee, caterpillar, snail and two butterflies. The product number is 903995, and the UPC code is 6 39277 03995 8 with a date code of 71.

The toys were sold for about $1 at Dollar Tree, Dollar Bills, Dollar Express, Greenbacks, Only One $1, and Deal$ stores nationwide from March 2007 through December 2007.

Consumers should take the toys away from children immediately and return them to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information, call Dollar Tree Stores at 800-876-8077.