

Letters

An Alzheimer's Story That Really Resonates

The cover story on Leeza Gibbons in your Fall issue really hit close to home. As I read about how Alzheimer's disease afflicted her mother and her maternal grandmother, I felt as if I were reading my own story — for my father and my paternal grandmother both died with Alzheimer's. I was so touched emotionally that I had to put the article down and call a friend who also has a family history of Alzheimer's. We both agreed that we're terrified of the mere word "Alzheimer's" and that we're worried about the possibility of inheriting this devastating disease.

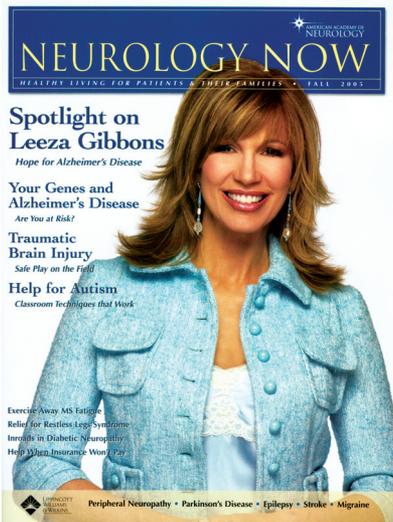
When I resumed reading the story, however, I felt supported and relieved as Gibbons explained how she's doing everything possible to protect herself from getting Alzheimer's. I too have decided that I will do all I can to stay healthy: I exercise, eat right, and read books to keep my mind sharp. As I'm sure many of your readers can attest, once you've experienced Alzheimer's in your family, it's never far from your thoughts. So I always offer support and understanding to those who are affected by the disease, from patients to caregivers. And every night I end my prayers with this: "Please keep me healthy."

Gabriella Mezzettone
Forest Hills, N.Y.

Help for Autism – and an Inspiring road

I recently picked up a copy of *Neurology Now* for the first time. As the grandmother of a young man with autism, I of course read the article "Help for Autism" with great interest. I then read in detail the rest of the Fall issue and found it informative and inspiring. Thank you for a magazine that provides support and education for the victims and loved ones of those with neurological problems.

Martha Loeffler
Modesto, Calif.



Like Leeza Gibbons, a reader is moved to do everything possible to protect herself against the devastating disease she worries about inheriting.

Expertise on Mad Cow Disease

I just read your magazine for the first time and love it: the articles are not only interesting, but provide valuable information. I must, however, take issue with Dr. Richard T. Johnson's advice on whether it was safe to eat meat because of the mad cow disease scare [ASK THE EXPERTS, Fall 2005]. Dr. Johnson, professor of neurology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, said the variant of mad cow disease that humans get — Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), which is fatal — "has never been transmitted in the U.S." I beg to differ. Last winter my mother-in-law passed away from what was diagnosed as CJD. While I don't want to start a panic and the risk is low of contracting the disease from meat,

telling people CJD is not transmitted in the United States is irresponsible.

Amanda Rinaldi
Columbia, Md

DR. JOHNSON RESPONDS:

Recent press interest in mad cow disease in Europe has been confusing to patients' families and, in some cases, their physicians — so I can understand your concern. It is true that since 1994 a variant of CJD related biologically to mad cow disease has appeared in Britain, where more than 150 cases have been recorded. The only U.S. case was a woman who died in Florida, but she had been raised and exposed in England. No patient in the U.S. has yet been found with this variant CJD, which has different clinical symptoms and pathology from other CJD types. Several hundred patients die every year in the U.S. from the common form that occurs sporadically with no known source of transmission, but these cases are caused by a different prion protein than mad cow disease and variant CJD. The cases of sporadic CJD have not been related to eating meat; indeed, this disease form, which I presume the correspondent's relative had, occurs at a rate of one per million persons annually worldwide. It occurs in vegetarians and in societies that do not eat beef. Whether this disorder occurs spontaneously or is acquired from some environmental source remains a major mystery in medicine.

We welcome your letters. E-mail them to neurologynow@lwwny.com or fax them to 646-674-6500. Include the writer's full name, address and phone number. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

We also welcome your personal essays. The SPEAK UP essay is a forum for people who live with neurological conditions and those who care for them. Please keep your submissions to 600 words.

RON DERHACOPAN

