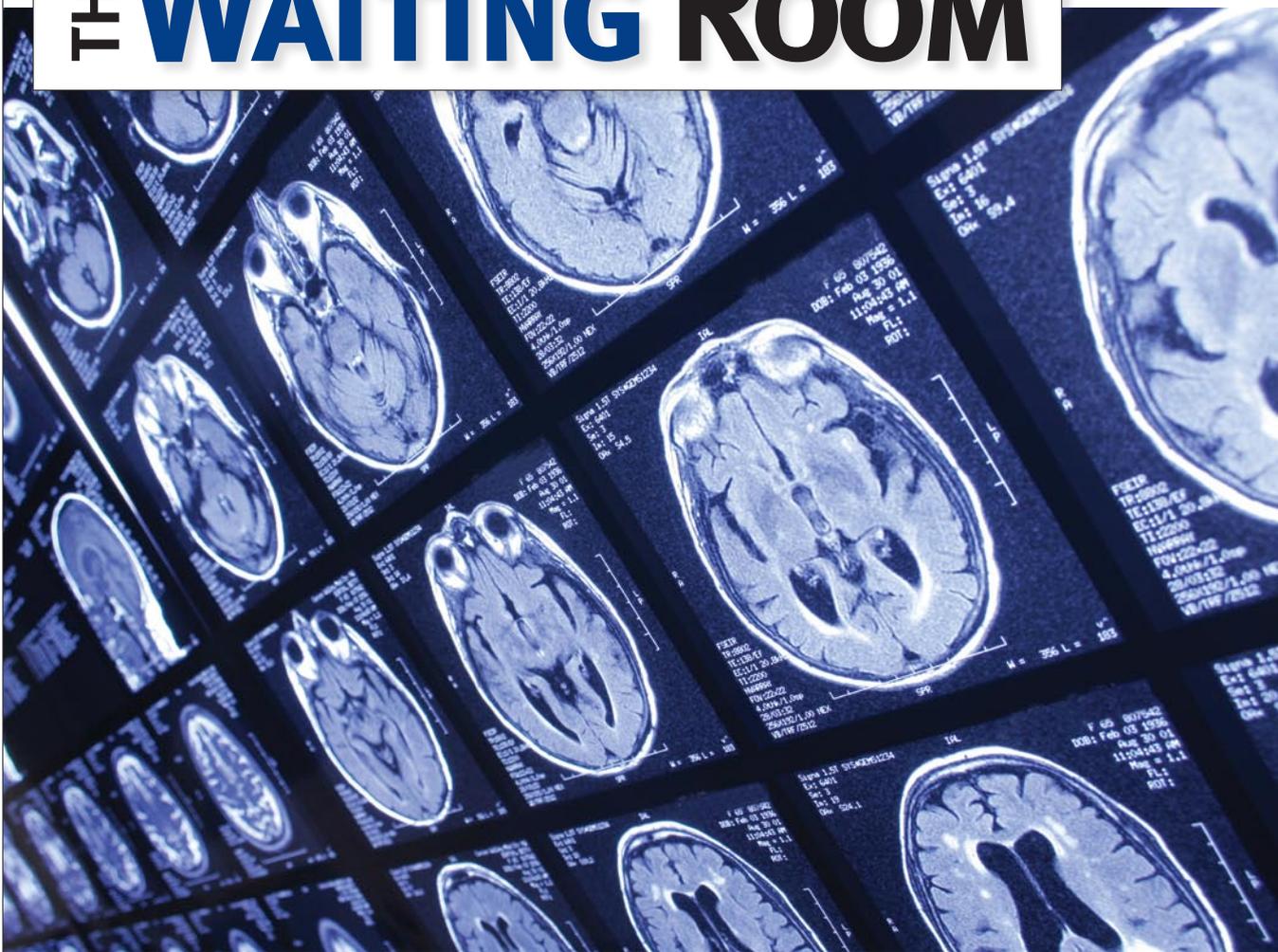


# THE WAITING ROOM



THIS WAY IN

## Statins and Stroke

**P**eople who started taking a cholesterol-lowering drug after a stroke lowered their risk of having a second stroke by one-fifth on average, according to a large study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2006.

For the study of 4,731 people, half were given the drug atorvastatin (Lipitor), one of many cholesterol-lowering drugs known as “statins,” and half were given an inactive placebo pill. Those who got the drug saw the level of their “bad” cholesterol, LDL, drop by 53 percent on average in just one month.

“For each 10 percent drop in LDL, the risk of stroke dropped 4 percent, and the risk of heart attack dropped 7 percent,” says the leader of the study, Pierre Amarenco, M.D., Ph.D., of Denis Diderot University in Paris, France.

All the participants had suffered either a stroke or so-called “mini” stroke, but none of them had any sign of heart disease when the study began. Those given atorvastatin took it at the highest allowed dose, 80 mg. All the participants

were followed up for four and a half years.

“The take-home message should be that statin drugs reduce the risk of stroke and heart disease in patients with or without underlying heart disease,” says Majaz Moonis, M.D., director of the Stroke Prevention Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center in Worcester.

The drug reduced the risk of so-called ischemic stroke (caused by a blockage in a blood vessel within the brain) by a whopping 21 percent, according to a secondary analysis of the study published online in the *American Academy of Neurology's journal Neurology* in December of 2007. But it also slightly increased the risk of hemorrhagic stroke (caused by bleeding in a blood vessel of the brain), by just under 1 percent. So overall, doctors emphasized that the benefit far outweighed the risk.

The study, called Stroke Prevention by Aggressive Reduction in Cholesterol Levels (SPARCL), was sponsored by Pfizer, Inc., the maker of Lipitor. —Dan Hurley

## OUR KIND OF WOMAN

# Marlene Kahan

**A**s executive director of the American Society of Magazine Editors in New York, NY for the past 18 years, Marlene Kahan has given and received many awards. But her proudest moment is yet to come, she told *Neurology Now*, when she will be honored with this year's Alan Bonander Humanitarian Award for her contribution to the Parkinson's disease community. She will receive the award on Saturday, April 26, 2008, at the 14<sup>th</sup> Parkinson's Unity Walk in New York City's Central Park.

"I am doing it for no other reason than knowing I can help myself and others, and to be rewarded and recognized for that is incredible," Kahan says.

Her involvement with the Parkinson's Unity Walk, a grassroots organization that raises awareness and funds for Parkinson's disease research, began nearly four years ago after her diagnosis with early-onset

Parkinson's disease at age 52. While researching the disease, she learned about Parkinson's Unity Walk, a national event that takes place in Central Park each year. Raising money to find a cure has helped her to tap into newfound inner strength.

Two years ago she formed Team Mag Queen, with a fundraising goal of \$1,000. She raised \$60,000 that first year, and has raised nearly \$200,000 to date. "What I liked is that 100 percent of donations goes to research," Kahan says.

Inspired by Lance Armstrong's Live Strong campaign, Kahan worked with her friend Dave Stevenson, a designer, to create a bracelet called "Inspiration" (available at [artinjection.com/store/htm](http://artinjection.com/store/htm)).

Kahan also developed a public service announcement for Parkinson's in 2006 with Carol Walton, CEO of the New Jersey-based Parkinson Alliance and the Parkinson's Unity Walk. She connected



Parkinson's advocates Marlene Kahan (right) with Maryum "May May" Ali.

with those in her industry to initiate the "Punch Out Parkinson's" campaign at a star-studded gala, including Muhammad Ali's daughter Maryum "May May" Ali.

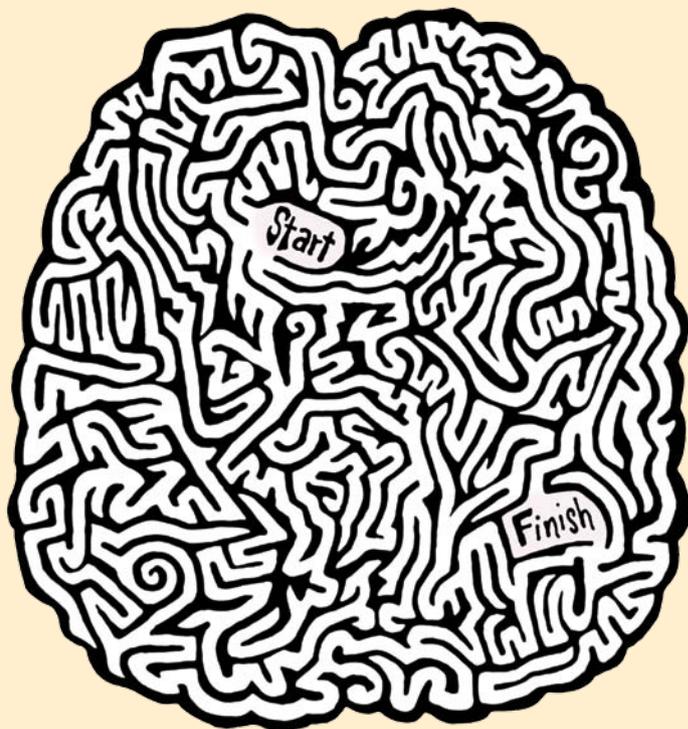
Meanwhile, she continues to oversee programs at the American Society of Magazine Editors, including the National Magazine Awards and the Magazine Internship Program. How does she fulfill her work duties while also taking care of her Parkinson's?

"Two or three times during the day—when my medicine wears off, the tremors come about, and before the medicine kicks in again—I need to rest. But everything gets done. Somehow I work through the symptoms."

Her advice for NN readers? "I think the most important thing is to make sure that anyone with Parkinson's sees a real movement-disorders specialist, someone who treats a large population of Parkinson's patients," she says. Exercise, which may help reduce the symptoms of the disease, is also key, Kahan says.

And if you're in New York in April, join the 10,000 participants at Unity Walk. (To learn more, visit [unitywalk.org](http://unitywalk.org).) Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc., is the partner and premier sponsor of the Parkinson's Unity Walk for the eighth year. After a new one-year record in 2007 of raising over \$1,700,000 for Parkinson's research, this year's dream is to raise \$2,000,000. "It's a way for people to come together and feel better about themselves," says Kahan, "and do good in the interim." — Elizabeth Stump

## BRAIN MAZE by Sharon R. Edmondson



# THE WAITING ROOM

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Restless Legs Syndrome

**R**estless legs syndrome (RLS) is a neurological disorder that results in uncomfortable sensations in the legs—creeping, burning, tingling, tugging—and an irresistible urge to move them. Symptoms begin or worsen while resting, which can interfere with sleep. “RLS patients may experience daytime tiredness, mood disturbance, and an impaired ability to perform daily activities,” says John Winkelman, M.D., Ph.D., medical director of the Sleep Health Center of Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, MA.

A study in *Neurology* in April 2007 found that the twitching leg movements during sleep produce sharp blood-pressure spikes that could contribute to the risk of cardiovascular disease, especially in the elderly. There is no cure, but the FDA-approved drugs ropinirole (Requip) and pramipexole (Mirapex) can alleviate symptoms.

#### 10:

Percentage of the U.S. population estimated to be affected by RLS.

#### 35:

Percentage of patients who report RLS-onset before age 20. The average age of diagnosis is 46.

#### 50:

Percent chance that RLS will be passed on from a parent with the disorder to each of his or her children, because the gene for RLS is passed on.

#### 25:

Percentage of women who develop RLS during pregnancy; symptoms often disappear after giving birth.

#### 720:

Estimated number of periodic limb movements a person with RLS experiences during an eight-hour night of sleep. These movements typically recur at 20- to 40-second intervals and can cause partial awakenings that disrupt sleep.

#### 3:

Minimum number of times most sufferers will wake up from sleep due to RLS.

Sources: Restless Legs Syndrome Foundation, Inc: [rls.org](http://rls.org)  
NINDS: [ninds.nih.gov/disorders/restless\\_legs/detail\\_restless\\_legs.htm](http://ninds.nih.gov/disorders/restless_legs/detail_restless_legs.htm)

—Elizabeth Stump



## SCREENING ROOM

### *The Cake Eaters*

(57<sup>th</sup> and Irving Productions, 2007)

**F**riedrich’s ataxia, a progressive neurological disease that causes loss of muscle control, has entered the spotlight of the independent film world.

*The Cake Eaters* features as one of its central characters 16-year-old Georgia, who has Friedrich’s ataxia. She is portrayed brilliantly by the young actress Kristen Stewart, who captures the disease’s characteristic rag-doll weakness and awkward gait while projecting a smoldering adolescent sexuality. First-time director Mary Stuart Masterson, best known for her nuanced acting in *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Benny and Joon*, videotaped interviews with real teenagers with Friedrich’s ataxia to help prepare Stewart for the role.

But this slow moving and insightful film refuses to buy into the after-school special narrative of the heroic teen who overcomes her disability. Georgia’s disability will not be overcome. The disease will persist until, as she puts it, “my heart gives out, and I don’t know when that will be.” And Georgia is not always heroic. Her quest to seduce Beagle, a school cafeteria worker played with depth and intelligence by Aaron Stanford, at first barely acknowledges his humanity. She wants to know what sex is like, and he is the means to that end.

Though Georgia is the most memorable character, the film spotlights the struggles of two families on either side of the class divide in a small town in the Catskill Mountains. As the privileged Georgia and working-class Beagle begin a relationship, Beagle’s newly widowed father Easy (played by Bruce Dern) tries to figure out the meaning of his affair with Georgia’s grandmother Marg (the feisty Elizabeth Ashley). Meanwhile, Beagle’s older brother returns from a failed music career in New York City, having missed his mother’s funeral. Each subplot revolves around two compelling themes: sex as a means to ward off death and loss, and the honorable burden of caretaking versus the guilty freedom of refusing to take care.

*The Cake Eaters* has been touring the film festival circuit, with critically acclaimed screenings at the Tribeca Film Festival, the Woodstock Film Festival, and Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival; additional screenings are scheduled at the Florida Film Festival, the California Independent Film Festival, the Independent Film Festival of Boston, the Newport (R.I.) International Film Festival, and elsewhere. Let’s hope this treasure of a film gets wider distribution, so it can be appreciated by audiences nationwide. —Lisa Phillips