EWAITING ROOM



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eople with migraines have differences in an area of the brain that helps process sensory information, including pain, according to a study published in the November 20, 2007 issue of Neurology, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

The study, which was supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health, the Swiss Heart Foundation, and the Harvard School of Dental Medicine Dean's Award, found that part of the cortex area of the brain is thicker in people with migraine than in people who do not have the neurological disorder.

Comparing 24 people with migraine to 12 people without migraine, the study found that the somatosensory cortex area

of the brain was an average of 21 percent thicker in those with migraine.

"Repeated migraine attacks may lead to, or be the result of, these structural changes in the brain," says study author Nouchine Hadjikhani, M.D., associate professor of radiology at Harvard Medical School in Boston, MA. "Most of

these people had been suffering from migraines since childhood, so the long-term overstimulation of the sensory fields in the cortex could explain these changes. It's also possible that people who develop migraines are naturally more sensitive to stimulation."

Dr. Hadjikhani says the results indicate that the brain's sensory mechanisms are important components in migraine. "This may explain why people with migraines often also have other pain disorders such as back pain, jaw pain, and other sensory problems such as allodynia, where the skin becomes so sensitive that even a gentle breeze can be painful."

What this means for people with migraine, says Dr. Hadjikhani, is that pain

should not be ignored or dismissed. "Pain might have negative consequences on the brain, so people should treat early. Don't play it tough," Dr. Hadjikhani says. "You could be training your brain to tolerate pain better, and this might not be a good thing."

-Mike Smolinsky

QUICK TIPS

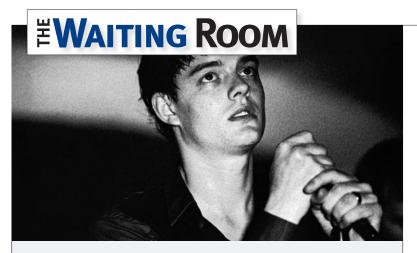
Preventing Falls

ge can make people more prone to dangerous falls, as can neurological disorders that affect movement, such as multiple sclerosis, stroke, and Parkinson's disease.

Barbara Resnick, Ph.D., professor of nursing at the University of Maryland, has authored guidelines for doctors on helping their patients prevent falls. She says the best prevention is "exercise, exercise, and exercise." Strong muscles help maintain balance. All it takes is about 30 minutes of moderate aerobic, strengthening, and balance exercises a day, Dr. Resnick says. To find exercises, she recommends visiting easyforyou.info.

Dr. Resnick also advises caregivers to keep their loved ones active. "The best thing you can do with mom is go for a walk with her." Here are more tips to prevent falls:

- MOVE WISELY: Think about how to move in the safest way possible before actually moving. Don't reach for things in an awkward position or carry large packages as you walk up stairs.
- ✓ SAFE-PROOF YOUR SPACE: Get rid of floor clutter or electrical cords that you might trip over.
- **☑** WEAR STURDY FOOTWEAR: Sneakers offer the best support. Slip-on shoes are the worst.
- ☑ CHECK THE HEIGHT OF YOUR BED AND CHAIRS: You should be able to sit up while also having your feet comfortably flat on the floor. To stand, move to the edge of the chair or bed and push up using both hands. — Stephanie Cajigal



SCREENING ROOM

Control

(The Weinstein Company, 2007)

llness can derail the dreams even of the most ambitious and talented. Such fate is especially cruel when it targets the young. It's a theme explored in the incisive film *Control*, which recounts the story of a young man from northeast England who, in the 1970s, became lead singer of the groundbreaking rock band Joy Division. Ian Curtis had his first massive epileptic seizure at 21, on the way back from a performance the band had just given in London.

Directed by the noted photographer Anton Corbijn and shot in atmospheric, high-contrast black and white, *Control* pulls no punches about what Curtis (Sam Riley, in a star-making turn) was up against. When we see the musician in his physician's office, we hear the doctor rattle off a long list of medications, most of which prove ineffective. Later, we get a glimpse of the meds lined up formidably in the medicine cabinet. We're also privy to the side effects of the drugs—including drowsiness, which results in Curtis falling asleep at the desk of his daytime government job.

The singer's early marriage and fatherhood factor strongly into his extramarital relationship and later depression. But there's no doubt that his epilepsy—he has a full-blown seizure on stage and is dragged off in full view of the audience—contributed to his sinking spirit and to the brooding intensity of his music. In 1980, right before Joy Division was about to cross the Atlantic for their first U.S. tour, Curtis hanged himself. He was 23.

More than 25 years after Curtis's death, and in spite of improved treatments, epilepsy is very much with us. So is Joy Division's music, which influenced an entire generation of New-Wave bands with its stark beauty.—*Coeli Carr*

BY THE NUMBERS

Epilepsy

pilepsy is a neurological disorder characterized by recurring seizures, which are the result of abnormal activity within clusters of neurons in the brain. Rather than discharging electrical energy in a controlled manner, the brain cells continue to fire, leading to strange sensations, convulsions, muscle spasms, or loss of consciousness. Seizure types vary depending on which part of the brain is affected, and they can range from a momentary disruption of the senses to violent movements lasting several minutes.

One in 10:

Number of adults who will have a seizure sometime during their life.

2 million:

Estimated number of people in the U.S. with epilepsy (1%-2% of the total population).

20:

Percentage of children whose seizures are due to cerebral palsy or other neurological abnormalities.

40:

Percentage of acquired epilepsy cases that are caused by stroke.

500:

Number of times in one second that neurons fire during a seizure. Neurons normally fire about 200 times a second.

500:

Estimated number of genes that could play a role in this disorder.

80:

Percentage of people with epilepsy who can control their seizures with medicine and surgery.

—Elizabeth Stump







Demolition Derby

Written and performed by Erik Stern (far left) and hosted by the NY Alzheimer's Association, "Demolition Derby" chronicles Stern's journey through his parents' dementia.