Shake, Quiver, and Tremble – No Longer A Pox on Paralysis Agitans

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When the face is as expressionless as a mask and the hands tremble like an aspen leaf; when elbows flex like a led pipe – well, you can call it Parkinson's syndrome. And you would probably be right. Let’s enlarge on that.

Dr. James Parkinson described the above signs, and a lot more, way back there in 1817, and probably never dreamed that it would become so common – like over a million cases in the U.S.A. today. Most victims lack a certain chemical called dopamine. Without dopamine, nerve impulses streaking out to the muscles are blocked. Muscle fibers resent being stripped of their power, thus the tremor, the lead-pipe rigidity, the hesitant steps, the quavering speech and all the rest. Sadly, Dr. Parkinson could not discover why both men and women come down with all this mess of symptoms as they age. Or why boxers get it. Or why the natives of the island of Guam are (or were) at high risk.

Is it because of our food; our diets? Well, could be. Certainly those who eat largely of plant foods (“veggies”) are at less risk than others. The people of Japan and China eat mainly of non-animal foods and their Parkinson cases are rare compared with the rest of us.

The Guam experience may also be plant-related. Here’s at least one theory: During the Japanese occupation, the natives were reduced to foraging for food as best they could. And that included a certain plant that contained a toxic plant chemical. Could that have been the cause? Now that the plant is no longer widely eaten, we hear that Parkinson’s is disappearing.

Designer drugs are high on the list of suspicious causes. Then there are those heavy metals, pesticides and defoliants like Agent Orange. Lots of theories, but the facts are sparse. At least until homocysteine surfaced.

Homocysteine, an amino acid, has been named a felon in the cause(s) of heart disease, the kind that sludges up the arteries and leads to eart attacks. Lately the experts are looking at homocysteine as a cause of Parkinson’s as well. Does high homocysteine factually like with Parkinson’s syndrome? It does in mice. For humans, we'll see how things develop. Meanwhile, it's simply a great idea to stay alert to homocysteine and keep it on a short leash. Folic acid puts homocysteine on the run.

Let’s say that again. Homocysteine is bad for hearts and brains. Nutritionists opine that the vitamin we call folic acid stamps out homocysteine in brain tissue and protects nerve cells from damage. In laboratory-bred mice, this is an established truth. Now what? Answer: Be sure to get your folic acid. And it's so easy, for we find it in abundance in whole wheat, citrus fruits, spinach, and other
dark green vegetables. Moreover, this vitamin is added by legal fiat to processed grain foods.

Now, wouldn’t it be great if we could prevent old Dr. Parkinson’s ailments with liberal doses of folic acid? Maybe even reverse it? Keep tuned. We’ll let you know.

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