

Maternal Link to Alzheimer's Makes a Gain

By NICHOLAS BAKALAR

Alzheimer's disease is more common in people whose mothers had the illness than in those whose fathers had it — and the evidence can be found in the brains of people who are still healthy.



Researchers studied 53 mentally healthy men and women over 60 years old. Ten had a father with Alzheimer's, 11 a mother with the disease, and 32 had no family history of the illness. Each volunteer underwent an initial M.R.I. examination and was examined again two years later.

All the volunteers were still cognitively normal at the two-year point, but those with a family history of Alzheimer's had significantly more brain atrophy than those without a family history. And even after controlling for age and sex, the deterioration was significantly greater in those with a maternal history of Alzheimer's than in those with a paternal one.

The authors acknowledge that the study, published in Tuesday's issue of *Neurology*, depended on volunteers reporting their parents' illnesses accurately.

Still, the lead author, Robyn A. Honea of the University of Kansas, said scientists were getting closer to quantifying risk with brain scans. "The goal is to do a scan on someone before they get the disease and be able to tell if they're at higher risk or starting to deteriorate," she said. "Can we do that now? No. We need more and larger studies." Bull....