



Twin Matters

A Family Newsletter from the Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry

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Fall 2015 Volume XXX

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Twin Photos and Stories

We love to receive photographs and stories about your experiences as a multiple or as the parent of multiples. Your picture and/or story may be used in an upcoming newsletter, or on our website! If you have sent photos and/or a story in the past and would like to send an update that would be great. We all enjoy learning about other multiples' experiences, so be sure to fill us in!

Southern Women's Show Ticket Winners

Last Spring the Southern Women's Show in Richmond was kind enough to provide the MATR with 10 pairs of tickets which we shared with participants through an email raffle. Below is feedback from some of the winners.

- Kathy Day a member of the MATR since the 1980's said: "I know as a twin I have a unique ability to help foster research. While being a twin is an amazing blessing, I also see it as a responsibility to help others/research. Being part of the MATR has allowed me to do that and to bond with other twins also involved with MATR."
- Judy Gibson has been participating in studies with the MATR since the mid-1990s. She told us "I find the studies interesting and fun to read the findings, I then compare it to me and my sister." It was through their participation in one of these studies that Judy and her sister found out they are identical twins, not fraternal.
- Tracey and Stacey Frame said "We like hearing about other twins in VA, especially all the Special Events; it's nice to interact with other twins."

Congratulations to all the ticket winners and thank you to everyone that responded!

The Juvenile Anxiety Study (JAS) and the Adolescent & Young Adult Twin Study (AYATS)

The JAS (headed by Dr. Hettema) and AYATS (headed by Dr. Roberson-Nay) research each address a similar question but with two different age groups. JAS focuses on families with twins ages 9 through 13 years old while AYATS looks at those in later adolescence and young adulthood (15 through about 20 years old). Both studies are trying to learn more about the development of depression and anxiety, which are known as internalizing disorders. Since they need participants that represent what might be encountered in the general population, they enroll twins that show some early indications of experiencing anxiety and depression as well as those that do not.

Having such a span of age groups between the two studies provides the research teams an opportunity to measure behaviors during a time—early juvenile through adolescence and into young adulthood—of rapid human development and life changes. Observing the different responses individuals have to study tasks may help the researchers pinpoint developmental periods more strongly associated with risk of developing an internalizing disorder later in life or having an existing one worsen into adulthood. Identifying those time frames of increased risk could translate into knowing when a treatment or intervention might be most effective. In addition to observing measurable behaviors during the research tasks, both studies are also collecting information about personality, environment, and genetics which will provide a more complete picture regarding the risk factors for developing an internalizing disorder.

The MATR is thrilled to be part of this collaborative team with potential outcomes that could shed light on an issue that affects millions of individuals and their quality of life. Since both studies require as many twin pairs as possible (ideally at least 400-450 pairs per study!) to strengthen their statistical analyses, we are actively contacting families to tell you about this exciting research. The MATR will likely finalize its recruitment for JAS by the end of 2015 (though the study will continue with scheduling already enrolled families into the New Year). Recruitment for AYATS will continue for at least another year.

Both the MATR and the research groups are so grateful for the willingness of our twins and their families who have already taken part in the study or have agreed to learn more and are waiting to schedule their study day appointment. Both study teams are willing to work with each family to find a day and time that is convenient to the family—this includes weekends and evenings. If you've already been contacted by either study but haven't gotten your appointment scheduled, please know that there is still time. Just call or email the study; if you no longer have the study contact information, please contact the MATR and we can provide it to you.

NOTE: Both studies are funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).



"It is my hope that the JAS data will yield new insights into the causes of internalizing disorders and lead to the development of new, more effective treatments and prevention strategies. The generosity of each family's time in participating in this important research is very much appreciated."

- Dr. John Hettema
Principal Investigator of the Juvenile Anxiety Study

See more of what Dr. Hettema has to say at go.vcu.edu/pibio.

In This Issue

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- Save the Dates

Greetings MATR Community,

This year will soon draw to a close, and the MATR team cannot be any more pleased with how well it has gone so far! MATR twins and their families have been so helpful by participating in our research studies, which will further our knowledge of human health. In addition, we've enjoyed seeing many of your smiling faces at the various events throughout the year. We look forward to continuing this trend next year!

In other exciting news, the MATR has launched our very own Facebook page and we invite all of you to "like" us there to keep up to date with announcements and interesting news stories about twins: www.facebook.com/twinsmatr.

Warm Regards,

Judy L. Silberg

Judy Silberg, PhD
MATR Scientific Director



Study Results

MATR Twins Help Researchers Find...

Genetic Clues to Cigarette Addiction

Studying data provided by MATR twins has allowed VCU researchers to identify “specific sets of genetic variants that are specifically associated with cigarette addiction.” In other words, the researchers were able to advance the understanding that there is a genetic component to nicotine addiction by narrowing down what the specific genetic mechanisms might be. “Pinpointing these genetic variants could eventually assist in identifying the biological mechanism behind nicotine addiction and in generating novel drug therapy targets to help people break their addiction to nicotine.”

The data was collected from MATR twins who participated in the Virginia Twin Study of Adolescent Behavioral Development (VTSABD, also known as the MCV Twin Study) in the 1990’s. More recently (circa 2007-2009) these same twins were contacted by the MATR to provide a blood sample for the Genes Environment & Development Initiative (GEDI) study. The purpose of the GEDI project was to study DNA from the blood samples it collected in conjunction with the behavioral data the twins reported during VTSABD study (including smoking cigarettes). Connecting this information enabled the VCU researchers to reach these important findings.

We would like to extend our thanks to all of the twins who took part in the VTSABD and GEDI studies. By deciding to participate, you gave researchers the tools they needed to learn more about the genetic component of nicotine addiction, which will hopefully lead to more effective treatment options in the future. MATR twins can truly make a difference!

Evidence that Females Have Higher Genetic Risk for Insomnia

Did you take part in the Stress and Coping study with Dr. Kenneth Kendler in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s? If so, then you will be pleased to know that your participation has helped researchers find “evidence that the heritability of insomnia could be higher for females than it is for males, suggesting that genes influence sleep problems more for women.” This evidence will hopefully encourage healthcare professionals to look further into how treatment of insomnia for females can improve.

Links to the original VCU news articles can be found on our website here: go.vcu.edu/twinnews

MATR Recruitment Finalized

The MATR has completed recruitment for:

- **The Genetics & Epigenetics of Healthy Aging in Twins (GHA) study** - the study staff has begun its data analysis; see future newsletters and our website for any updates on what they learn.
- **The Mood & Immune Regulation Twin (MIRT) study** - study staff continue to schedule appointments with twins already recruited into the study.

The MATR, along with the research teams, cannot say thank you enough to those of you that participated in, or were willing to learn more about these studies. We are continuously grateful for the support given by our twins and their families to our research efforts which aim to improve understanding of human health conditions and behaviors!



Moving?

Remember to contact the MATR if your name, address, or telephone number changes by visiting the Update Your Info section of our website at matr.vcu.edu, sending us an email to matr@vcu.edu, or calling our toll free number 1-800-URA-TWIN.



EMBODY Study

Thanks to the engagement of strong and compassionate young women willing to take part in research, we are currently wrapping up recruitment for Dr. Candace Burton’s study of young women’s health and relationships (EMBODY). Dr. Burton is eagerly moving into the next phase, which includes review of collected responses and laboratory data analysis.

This research study hopes to shed light on the possible connection between young women’s health outcomes and relationship stress experienced during adolescence. Ultimately, the hope is that results from this research could improve health outcomes for women.

Email Address

Are you finishing school, changing jobs, getting a new internet carrier or just opening a new email account? Please email matr@vcu.edu to notify the MATR that your email address has changed so you don’t miss out on important messages from the MATR.

Save the Dates!

We have several exciting events scheduled for 2016. Mark your calendar now to be sure you don’t miss out:

Richmond Kids Expo
Richmond Raceway Complex
Saturday, February 27th, 2016

Southern Women’s Show
Richmond Raceway Complex
April 15th – 17th, 2016

MAPOM Convention
Tidewater MOM Sheraton Norfolk
Waterside Hotel
April 22nd – 23rd, 2016

Multiples Family Day at Kings Dominion
Kings Dominion Amusement Park
Saturday, June 18th, 2016

See our Events page at matr.vcu.edu for additional information and other events throughout 2016.



Adolescent & Young Adult Twin Study (AYATS)

Study opportunity for adolescent and young adult twins...

Researchers at VCU’s Department of Psychiatry are working on a study funded by the National Institutes of Health in hopes of learning more about how certain conditions, such as anxiety and depression develop.

Participants the study will need include:

- Generally healthy MATR twin *pairs* (Caucasians, 15 through 19 years old)
- Twin pairs, including the young adult twins, need to be living full-time at home with their parent(s)
- One or both parents (or legal guardians) of the twin pair

Study participation involves:

- Parent/Guardian of adolescent twins or the adult twins (18+) completing a phone call (approximately 20 minutes) with a MATR Interviewer. This phone call will include some questions to collect basic study data and ask permission for the study to contact the parent or young adult twins directly.
- Both members of the twin pair (for adolescent twins this includes at least one of the parents/guardians) completing an appointment at VCU in Richmond, VA to complete study tasks and questionnaires.
- Optional online survey to be completed by parents.
- Financial compensation will be provided by the study.

If Interested:

Contact the *Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry* (MATR) and let us know that you want to learn more about the **Adolescent & Young Adult Twin Study (AYATS)**. Please let us know the full names and DOB of the twin pair. Parents, please provide your full name as well. You can reach us at:

- 1-800-URA-TWIN (1-800-872-8946) toll-free
- matr@vcu.edu
- www.matr.vcu.edu; click “Contact MATR”

Mood & Immune Regulation in Twins (MIRT) Study Update

The Mood and Immune Regulation Twin Study (MIRT), funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and directed by VCU’s Dr. Briana Mezuk, is in its second year of interviewing adult twin pairs to understand the relationship between stress, depression, and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. In the US, 1 in 10 adults have type 2 diabetes and 1 in 3 adults have pre-diabetes. The type 2 diabetes epidemic is a serious burden to families and costs the US \$245 billion in medical expenses and lost wages each year. Dr. Mezuk and colleagues are trying to understand how the contributions of both genetics and the social environment influence the relationship between stress, depression, and diabetes risk. While the MATR is no longer recruiting new twins to participate in this study, the study continues to enroll twins that agreed to be contacted by the study staff. To date, the team has enrolled 42 twin pairs and will complete study enrollment in early winter of 2016. Information gathered from this study will help inform efforts to address how stress impacts biological, psychological and behavioral processes that increase risk for diabetes. We will keep you updated in our newsletters and on the website regarding when the study staff also finalizes all enrollment and begins their analysis.

We Value You

The Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry (MATR) values our participants. If you have feedback regarding your experiences with MATR staff or research staff for any study, please do not hesitate to send us an email to matr@vcu.edu, call 1-800-URA-TWIN (1-800-872-8946) or call our Participant Coordinator, Carol Williams, at 804-828-8116.