

## Does stammering lie in our genes?

Well known cinematic icons like Bruce Willis, Marilyn Monroe and Carly Simon suffered from stuttering.

The condition which afflicts five percent of all children can be traumatic, producing educational, social and occupational disadvantages. It affects three million Americans, which most are able to overcome, according to a study.

Researchers were able to identify areas on several chromosomes which indicated a linkage to stuttering, opening up the possibility of identification of specific genes linked with stuttering.

Ehud Yairi, visiting professor at Tel Aviv University's (TAU) Sackler School of Medicine and founder of Illinois International Stuttering Research Program at the University of Illinois, is among the leaders of the project.

Yairi and his fellow researchers are now reporting strong evidence for a significant genetic component to stuttering. They've established that the likelihood of both a spontaneous recovery from stuttering and the development of a chronic disorder are genetically linked.

Yairi, who himself suffered from a severe stutter into early adulthood and still exhibits a mild form of the disorder at 69, first suspected that stuttering had genetic ties in his own family, according to a TAU release.

Before him, his grandfather, father, aunts and cousins --on his father's side had exhibited mild to severe forms of stuttering. 'I've become an expert in my own problem,' he jokes.

'One of the most important goals for us as researchers is to identify ways for making early prognoses, diagnosing both those children who would exhibit chronic stuttering through their lifetimes and those who would recover naturally,' said Yairi.

A recent major study supported by National Institutes of Health took the genetic aspect a step further by geneotyping blood samples collected from Israeli, Swedish, and American families with multiple cases of stuttering.

These findings were published recently in the American Journal of Human Genetics and the Journal of Communication Disorders.

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