



An Australian Government Initiative

national science week 2010

Nick Blackburn, Menzies Research Institute ***Motor neuron disease – finding a therapy***

The human brain is amazing. The squishy stuff between our ears drives every aspect of our lives! It keeps our brains going, our hearts beating, our lungs breathing, allows us to form memories and to run marathons (some of us anyway, certainly not me!).

Sometimes the building blocks of the brain, the cells that make it up, stop working together properly. The brain might be injured in a car accident or develop one of the many neurodegenerative diseases that affect humans. My research focuses on one of these diseases called motor neuron disease which affects the body's motor neurons. Motor neurons are the cells that control the movement of our arms, legs, fingers as well as many other muscles in the body. In this disease, the motor neurons gradually die causing patients to lose control of their body movements. My research this year is to look at how we can prevent these cells from dying and hopefully, one day, help find a therapy for motor neuron disease.



I never thought I'd be a scientist, but I knew I loved learning and I always wanted to know more. As a scientist, that's what you do, you learn until you know everything you think you can about a topic, then you try and find out more yourself by experimenting with things no one else ever has before.

At UTAS I studied a Bachelor of Science, majoring in Biochemistry. I was lucky enough in my second year to receive a scholarship from the Menzies Research Institute, designed to allow science students to experience what professional research might be like. As part of this scholarship I was able to work with the NeuroRepair group on a research project, gaining experience in research whilst learning new and exciting things about neuroscience. I've continued to work with the same group this year for my honours project on motor neuron disease.

As a scientist I personally look forward to traveling the world for my research, meeting amazing people in countries so very different from our own and having a great time while working with others to make all our lives better. Science begins with questions - simple, complex, random and sometimes even crazy questions. Through science we find the answers to those questions - sometimes making the world just that little bit better for anyone and everyone.

Find out more about motor neuron disease at: <http://www.mndaust.asn.au/>, and about the Menzies Research Institute at: www.menzies.utas.edu.au

www.youngtassiescientists.com