

## Science Briefs

### New E. coli treatment

(AP) — Researchers said they have moved a step closer to developing what could be the first drug to save the lives of victims of an especially dangerous strain of E. coli.

Infections from a strain called O157:H7 kill 250 people in the United States each year, many of them children 5 and under.

The bacteria produce a poison that works its way into the bloodstream and damages the kidneys.

Researchers at the University of Alberta in Canada have created a new "inhibitor": a five-limbed molecule armed with 10 grippers that are designed to grab the toxins and escort them out of the body. Its designers call it "Starfish."

In test-tube experiments, Starfish appears to be far more effective than the other inhibitors undergoing testing. If it works in humans, it would be a big step.

There are no vaccines or inhibitors for E. coli infections on the market, and doctors say there is not much they can do to treat the related kidney disorder besides giving patients dialysis and blood transfusions.

The researchers said Starfish shows promise, but they are still testing its effectiveness in humans.

The study was published in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

### NASA launch planned

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — For the first time in days, NASA had good news on the space shuttle front: Endeavour is free of problems heading into Friday's launch attempt and the weather looks good.

"I'm encouraged — the sun is shining," shuttle program manager Ron Dittemore said Wednesday. "It looks like it's clear skies and, hopefully, if the weather is good to us, we'll have a good launch."

With high wind the only concern and a small one at that, Endeavour is scheduled to blast off at 12:30 p.m. Friday on an Earth-mapping mission that has been delayed five months by damaged wiring and other shuttle trouble.

# Scents or Sensibilities

## Do pheromones really work in humans?

BY ERIN LOOS  
Special to The Battalion

The most prevalent aroma in Northgate on Valentine's Day might be beer, but when it comes to attracting the opposite sex, some researchers suggest that chemicals in another person's sweat might cause more of a sexual obsession, than say, Obsession.

Some perfume marketers claim pheromones, a group of odorless chemical messengers, are the newest strategy for women and men to attract members of the opposite sex.

Cosmetic and fragrance companies, including Avon, Philosophy and others, have recently begun selling pheromone-based perfumes, colognes and body lotions at prices that may seem shocking.

For instance, a synthetic pheromone "falling in love" from Philosophy costs \$60 for a 4 milliliter vial. However, overconfident casanovas could be spending their money on products that have no effect whatsoever on the opposite sex.

"These products may attract the opposite sex because chemicals in them stimulate our olfactory system. But there is no compelling scientific evidence that pheromones are at work," said Dr. W.R. Klemm, Texas A&M professor of veterinary medicine.

Although scientists agree that many members of the animal kingdom, including moths and mice, communicate with pheromones, there is still debate over whether human pheromones exist and whether we have the ability to detect them.

Other animals possess a tiny group of nerve cells, the vomeronasal organ (VNO), that allows them to de-

tect pheromones.

More than a century ago, scientists located small pits inside human nostrils that could be a VNO, but there is still question as to whether it works.

"No one has demonstrated a functioning VNO system in humans," Klemm said. "Nobody has discovered human pheromones, either."

However, recent research has suggested that our bodies secrete chemicals, possibly pheromones, that seem to influence the behavior of others.

For example, female roommates or friends often menstruate at the same time due to an unknown substance in their underarm perspiration.

Could these same chemicals be sending mating signals as well?

In 1995, Swiss zoologist Claus Wedekind conducted an experiment to determine if women were more attracted to men with a specific scent.

Wedekind's study was based on the theory that two people usually smell

If two people with dissimilar MHC gene profiles mate, there is a greater possibility of producing stronger, healthier offspring.

Wedekind instructed 44 men to wear the same T-shirt for two nights in a row.

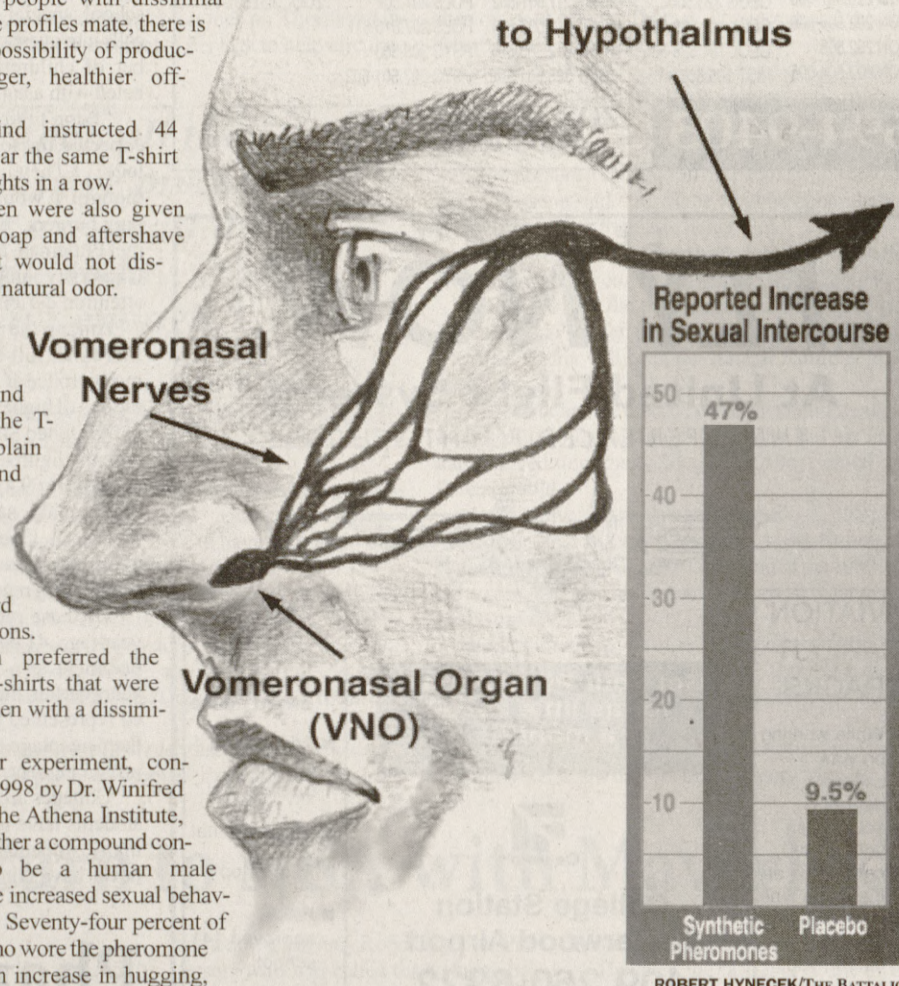
The men were also given odorless soap and aftershave lotion that would not disguise their natural odor.

Wedekind then put the T-shirts in plain boxes and asked 49 women to sniff the shirts and record their reactions.

Women preferred the scent of T-shirts that were worn by men with a dissimilar MHC.

Another experiment, conducted in 1998 by Dr. Winifred Cutler of the Athena Institute, tested whether a compound considered to be a human male pheromone increased sexual behavior in men. Seventy-four percent of the men who wore the pheromone reported an increase in hugging, kissing and sexual intercourse.

If human pheromones do exist, researchers may try to determine how they can be used in fertility treatments and dieting aids. And, sweethearts seducing with chocolate or flowers on Valentine's Day might want to be aware that a passionate love affair may be right under their nose.



Reported Increase in Sexual Intercourse

47%  
9.5%

Synthetic Pheromones Placebo

ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

**"No one has demonstrated a functioning VNO system in humans."**

— Dr. W.R. Klemm  
vet professor

best to each other when their genetically-based immunity to disease differs most.

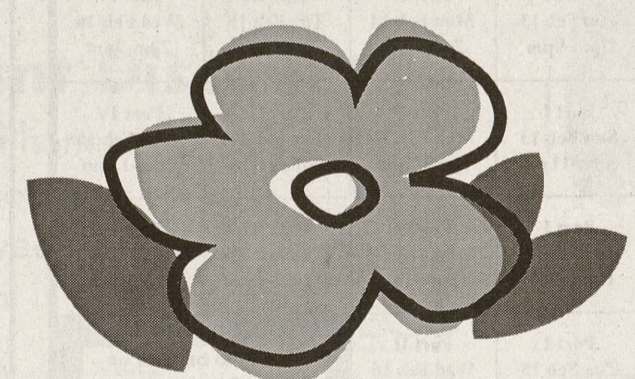
The genes that determine immunity are called major histocompatibility complex (MHC) genes. MHC genes produce chemicals that help the body detect and destroy foreign cells.

(Above) Scientists located small pits inside human nostrils that could be VNOs, but there is still question as to whether they work. According to one study by the Athena Institute, pheromones directly increased sexual activity.

# FRESH FLOWERS

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