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Scientist crack egg phenomenon

(AP) — Just in time for Easter, mathematicians have cracked the mystery of why a hard-boiled egg spun on a tabletop rises on one end and whirls like a top.

The explanation, in an eggshell: friction.

Mathematicians from England and Japan spent six months filching eggs from their families' refrigerators and trying to explain the mysterious forces controlling this behavior. Their findings appear in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*.

Keith Moffatt of the University of Cambridge in England and Yutaka Shimomura of Keio University in Japan believed that demonstrating how this effect works would be a simple, fun exercise. Instead, it "turned out to be very subtle and quite tricky," Moffatt said.

Their report contains no fewer than 16 equations in less than two pages.

Here is an explanation for the spinning Easter egg conundrum, without the mathematics:

Imagine an egg spinning on

its side on a tabletop. Because of the curve of its shell, it is touching the table at only one point. But the contact point is not fixed; it slides in a small circle around an imaginary vertical axis.

As the egg slides across the table, the friction created slows the egg's rotation slightly, and the contact point with the table moves off-center. The egg begins to twist as it spins. One end slowly rises until the egg stands vertically. For a few seconds, anyway.

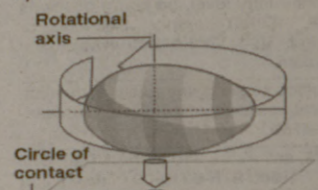
The egg can be any size or type. It must be hard-boiled.

"When you try to spin a soft egg on a table the liquid fluid inside lags behind the shell," Moffatt said. "You set the shell in motion but the fluid doesn't want to spin up. By the time the fluid is spinning at the same time as the shell, it's lost a lot of kinetic energy and it's just not got enough remaining to stand up on its end."

Or in non-scientific terms: Splat.

Hard-boiled physics

In Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature*, mathematicians explain, in a series of heady equations, the physics of why a hard-boiled egg rises up like a top when it's spun on its side.



The contact point between the egg and the surface is not fixed. It moves in a small circle around the egg's rotational axis.



The egg must be hard-boiled to achieve this result. The liquid inside a soft egg will not maintain the same kinetic energy as the shell.



The egg must be hard-boiled to achieve this result. The liquid inside a soft egg will not maintain the same kinetic energy as the shell.

SOURCE: *Nature* AP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man with artificial heart released

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The longest-living recipient of a self-contained artificial heart has been released from the hospital, doctors said Wednesday.

Tom Christerson, the second recipient of the AbioCor artificial heart and one of only two still living, is now residing at a hotel one block from Jewish Hospital.

According to a statement from the hospital, where he underwent the surgery Sept. 13, Christerson was discharged March 20.

Doctors said Christerson's move to the hotel is a first step in allowing him to return to his home in Central City, about two hours southwest of Louisville.

"The rest of Mr. Christerson's routine, such as twice daily rehab and occasional lab tests, will remain the same," said Dr. Laman Gray, one of the University of Louisville surgeons who implanted the artificial heart.

Part of the transition plan includes training hospital and emergency staff in and near Central City on the type of care a patient with an artificial heart might need.

Estrogen could decrease heart disease

(AP) — Testing women for a common genetic variation may help doctors predict which patients can lower their risk of heart disease by taking estrogen.

Millions of women take estrogen supplements to relieve hot flashes and other symptoms of menopause, and it was long assumed the pills also prevented heart disease by improving cholesterol levels. Recent studies have raised doubts about an across-the-board benefit, adding to the confusion about who should get estrogen and for how long.

Now researchers say there could be a way to zero in on those women who might lower their risk of heart disease by taking estrogen. They found that a specific version of a gene appears to enhance estrogen's effect on HDL, the so-called good cholesterol.

Women with the gene variant had double the increase of HDL when taking estrogen, according to the study in Thursday's *New*

England of Journal of Medicine.

"We don't yet know for sure whether this dramatic increase in HDL translates into a reduction in risk for heart disease. But it certainly is very promising," said Dr. David M. Herrington, one of the researchers at Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

If the heart benefits are confirmed, Herrington said, doctors could do a simple genetic test to find out if their patients have the gene variant. The results could help them decide whether to recommend hormone supplements and how much to prescribe.

"Hormone replacement therapy may no longer be considered a one-size-fits-all proposition," Herrington said. "This may actually really help doctors individualize the way they treat women."

The researchers analyzed DNA from 309 postmenopausal women with heart disease who were given either hormones or a dummy pill and followed for three years.

They looked for variations in a gene that plays a key role in how the body's cells react to estrogen.

One particular variant was found in nearly 20 percent of the women taking hormones. Those women had a 27 percent increase in good cholesterol, compared with a 13 percent increase in the other women taking hormones. LDL, the bad cholesterol, decreased but the gene variant did not appear to make a significant difference.

Herrington said the study was too small to show whether the higher levels of good cholesterol actually helped the women's hearts.

Another issue is whether the gene makes women more sensitive to the other effects of estrogen, Herrington said. Hormones are used to prevent brittle bones and treat the symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes, night sweats and vaginal dryness. But long-term use of hormones may increase the risk of breast cancer.

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