ALZHEIMER'S AND ME

John Jennings
Family link leads to breakthrough on Alzheimer’s disease

By Talom Prentice, medical correspondent

The cause of an inherited form of Alzheimer’s disease has been discovered by British scientists, offering the prospect of new drugs to treat it. The disease is the most common progressive brain disorder, accounting for 10 per cent of all cases of dementia but symptoms seldom appear before the age of 60. The disease destroys nerve cells in the brain, shrinking the volume of brain substance and gradually destroying memory and personality.

Alzheimer’s disease breakthrough made

Family key may unlock the cure

Scientists have made a breakthrough which could lead to a cure for Alzheimer’s disease — thanks to a Notts family.

Mrs Carol Jennings, of Ruddington, went to doctors working on the disease, which brings on senility, because her father and some of his relations developed it.

Because her father had no brothers and sisters, four of whom were struck by the disease, the doctors wanted to study the family in more detail.

Now, after three years’ research, the doctors have discovered the particular gene which triggers the hereditary form of the disease.

And they have developed a test which shows people in families with a history of Alzheimer’s whether they will develop it in later life.

“IT is marvellous news and has made all the effort made by the family worthwhile,” said Mrs Jennings, 36, of Loughborough Road.

Symptoms

Carol’s crusade began

“We had a 50/50 chance of senility”

Carol persuaded her aunt and uncle to give blood samples and, after she drew a family tree showing who had developed the disease, they sought funding from the Medical Research Council for an in-depth study.

Delight

But by 1987, Carol’s dad had to go into full-time care, later to be joined by two of his sisters.

By then the family knew they had a hereditary strain of the disease and everyone had a 50/50 chance of developing it.

Carol knows that if she gets it, chances are one of her two children — Emily, nine or six-year-old John — will develop it in later life.
Jane Hill meets John Jennings

More from the series where broadcasters follow their personal passions by talking to the people whose stories interest them most. BBC newsreader Jane Hill’s father and uncle both lived