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Letters

Why wrinkles?

The difference between the pictures of the monk and the woman in the cover art for "Wrestling With Wrinkles" (SN: 9/24/88, p. 200) is certainly striking, but is it caused solely by the sun? There are more differences between the two than just the amount of solar radiation each receives — one of the more obvious being that the first lives on an island, the second in a desert. What part does humidity play? What part diet? Should we all move to Florida? Stop eating tortillas?

Though the focus of this article was deterioration of the skin, there are more serious aspects of aging than looks. How much of the breakdown of our cells comes from the constant stress of gravity? Could it be that we would live longer in a weightless environment?

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Cover: Brain cells retrieved from an aborted human fetus stain yellowish-orange, indicating they are alive and well 70 days after being transplanted into the brain of a monkey. The experiment, described on page 292, is the latest in a series of animal studies designed to pave the way for transplants of human fetal cells into people. But the controversial experimental therapy, which scientists say may benefit patients with Parkinson's disease, diabetes and other disorders, has anti-abortionists and others up in arms. (Photo: John R. Sladek Jr.)

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Still, thanks for a most informative article; I've started wearing my hat whenever I go out.

*Drew Green
Tucson, Ariz.*

You neglected to mention a prevalent cause of wrinkling and skin damage: the peripheral vascular constriction triggered by nicotine.

*Tim Bouquet
Washington, D.C.*

There is at least a partial explanation for the wrinkling of skin. We demonstrated many years ago (1954-1969) the loss of hyaluronic acid and reduction of molecular weight in the skin with advancing age. This seemed to be correlated with loss of lean body mass. This reduced the water-holding capacity of the skin.

We believe that we also simulated the collagen changes by exposing acid-soluble collagen labeled with ¹⁴C tyrosine to high-oxygen pressure (free radical effect). We obtained a yellow fluorescent material that contained di-tyrosine. The collagen was almost unrecognizable as this substance. Di-tyrosine has now been reported many times in exposed collagen.

*Harry Sobel
Sherman Oaks, Calif.*

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