

SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

A Science Service Publication
Volume 139, No. 3, January 19, 1991

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SCIENCE NEWS (ISSN 0036-8423) is published weekly on Saturday, except the last week in December, for \$34.50 for 1 year or \$58.00 for 2 years (foreign postage \$6.00 additional per year) by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing office. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to SCIENCE NEWS, 231 West Center Street, Marion, OH 43305. Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required — old and new addresses, including zip codes, must be provided.

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Editorial and Business Offices:
1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
(202-785-2255)

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Subscription Department:
231 West Center St., Marion, OH 43305
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Letters

Immunologic pudding

I read with interest your report on our work on a peptide vaccine for asthma/hay-fever-type allergies ("New allergy vaccine brings relief to rats," SN: 12/1/90, p.341), the culmination of years of probing into the molecular pathology of anaphylactic antibodies.

Our "shaky" hypothesis, as NIH immunologist Henry Metzger refers to it, postulates that the IgE antibody plays an *active* role in initiating mediator release by providing a triggering signal to the sensitized mast cell as a consequence of allergen challenge. By using histamine-releasing polypeptides as models, we predicted the likely chemical characteristics of such a trigger site within the Fc region of the IgE molecule. We identified just one region within the CH4 domain of human IgE that possessed all these structural credentials. A synthetic peptide comprising this sequence was shown to initiate histamine release from nonsensitized mast cells in a manner closely resembling the regular IgE antibody-allergen-

This Week

- 36 Hot Year Prompts Greenhouse Concern
- 36 COBE maps the interstellar medium
- 37 Cold fusion still hasn't given up the ghost
- 37 Probing a trapped molecule's dynamics
- 38 Ancient city shows where cotton was king
- 38 Single-lung transplant saves failing hearts
- 38 AIDS vaccine: Safe, but does it work?
- 39 New worries over non-aspirin analgesics
- 39 Quasar erupts with relativistic flair

Research Notes

- 45 Biomedicine
- 45 Chemistry
- 47 Physics
- 47 Space Sciences

Articles

- 40 The Safer Sex?

Cover: Heart disease, traditionally viewed as a "male" malady, is the nation's number-one killer of men and women alike. In fact, women with the disease run an even higher risk than men of suffering a fatal heart attack or dying during coronary bypass surgery. Researchers are now trying to figure out why. (Illustration: Randy Fletcher)

- 42 Toxin to the Rescue

Departments

- 34 Books
- 35 Letters

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pudding will be in the eating.

Denis R. Stanworth
Immunologist
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Dandelion wine?

The studies implicating lecithin as an anti-cirrhotic phospholipid ("Soybean Lecithin May Prevent Cirrhosis," SN: 12/1/90, p.340) may vindicate the folkloric use of yellow flowers, in particular dandelions, as a treatment for yellow jaundice. Out of curiosity, I dipped into my "Father Nature's Farmacy" database after reading your story, to see which edible species had the most lecithin in the reports I had covered. To my surprise, dandelion flowers excelled, with a lecithin concentration of 29,700 parts per million (ppm). Soybeans had 15,000 to 25,000 ppm, mung

Letters continued on p.43

JANUARY 19, 1991

35