

**SPOTTED**

# Cooperating brains; data confusion; homeopathy claims and more

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## Cooperating brains

Although some research has linked **autism and brain size**, the association remains uncertain. New findings suggest that human cooperation to solve problems **helps limit brain size**. Brains that share the cognitive load instead of working alone have lower metabolic needs and can be smaller, according to results published 23 May in *Nature*. If people were loners, our brains would be bigger, the researchers say, providing a possible link between big brains and autism.

### SOURCES:

**Nature** / 24 May 2018

Inference of ecological and social drivers of human brain-size evolution

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0127-x>

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## Data confusion

A European law that took effect 25 May tightens online personal privacy protections. But it has left some international researchers unsure how to handle people's online data. A *Nature* editorial published 22 May notes the **many gray areas** in the law. For instance, it leaves many of the legal decisions in the hands of each country. This patchwork approach will leave the nations "out of step" with each other, increasing the confusion, *Nature* editors say.

The editorial calls for quick approval of a code of conduct. Affected groups, hailing from academia, industry and the general population, are crafting these clarifications to ensure that no one violates the law by accident.

**SOURCES:**

**Nature** / 22 May 2018

Science needs clarity on Europe's data-protection law

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05220-y>

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## Homeopathy claims

Canadian health officials are pushing back hard against **claims from naturopaths** promising "complete elimination of autism" using their homeopathic approaches. British Columbia's chief health officer called the claims, which rely on an unfounded belief that vaccines cause autism, "certainly not based on science," Canada's *CBC News* reported 25 May.

**SOURCES:**

**Canadian Broadcasting Corporation** / 25 May 2018

Homeopathy for autism 'certainly not based on science,' B.C. health official says

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/homeopathy-for-autism-certainly-not-based-on-science-b-c-health-official-says-1.4677128>

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## New conference

The U.K. organization Autistica's first annual autism research conference will feature opportunities specifically for **early-career researchers**, including abbreviated talks and dedicated awards. The conference aims to cover mental and physical health, **epilepsy** and the complex needs of people with autism. Autism self-advocate and bestselling author **John Elder Robison** is slated to be the keynote speaker at the event, to be held 6 September 2018 in London.

**SOURCES:**

**Autistica** / 23 May 2018

Autism Research Conference

<https://www.autistica.org.uk/news/autism-research-conference>

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## Licensed drivers

Learning to drive is a rite of passage for many adolescents. The process can pose special

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challenges for teens on the spectrum, however. Mastering the complexity of in-the-moment decision-making and the **sequencing demands of driving** may take more time for young adults with autism, according to findings published 18 May in the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*.

**SOURCES:**

**Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics** / 18 May 2018

Driving comparisons between young adults with autism spectrum disorder and typical development  
<https://insights.ovid.com/crossref?an=00004703-900000000-99299>

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## Expelling harassers

After persistent public campaigns demanding change, the presidents of the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine are considering policies that would allow **ejection of members** who commit sexual harassment. The concession came after several high-profile harassment cases involving their members highlighted the lack of any mechanism for removal, *Science* reported 29 May.

**SOURCES:**

**Science** / 29 May 2018

Will U.S. academies expel sexual harassers?

<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/05/will-us-academies-expel-sexual-harassers>

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## Marshmallow test revisited

The marshmallow test is a classic in child psychology research. It tests self-control in young children by giving them a choice between consuming one marshmallow right away or waiting — and earning two marshmallows. In initial studies, the ability to delay gratification correlated with achievement in adolescence.

Researchers have now given the test to a **more diverse group of children** than participated in earlier studies. In this group, the link between the ability to wait and achievement is quite weak, with a strong influence from family factors, such as home environment. A tendency to hold out for two marshmallows is also not a good predictor of adolescent behavioral outcomes, according to the study, published 25 May in *Psychological Science*.

**SOURCES:**

## Psychological Science / 25 May 2018

Revisiting the marshmallow test: a conceptual replication investigating links between early delay of gratification and later outcomes

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797618761661>

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## Peer-review reprise

Last week, *Spotted* highlighted an argument for **public peer review**, so in the interest of balance, here's a commentary calling for **double-blind peer review**. Both proposals address flaws in the process: Public peer review is proposed to heighten transparency, whereas double-blind peer review is expected to reduce bias related to a researcher's reputation or gender. A viewpoint published 28 May in *Communications of the ACM* elaborates on the value of double-blind peer review.

### SOURCES:

#### Communications of the ACM / 28 May 2018

Effectiveness of anonymization in double-blind review

<https://cacm.acm.org/magazines/2018/6/228027-effectiveness-of-anonymization-in-double-blind-review/fulltext>

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## Spotlighting Morocco

A former Baghdad bureau chief for *The Washington Post* has stepped behind the camera to make a documentary about **autism in Morocco**. Jackie Spinner's sons, both adopted from Morocco, are on the spectrum, inspiring her to make "Don't Forget Me," about the lives of children with autism and their families in the African nation, *Chicago Magazine* reported 25 May.

Spinner says that she chose film as her medium so that viewers must rely on visuals to understand what's happening. This way of understanding the world reflects the experience of people on the spectrum who have difficulties with spoken language, she says.

### SOURCES:

#### Chicago Magazine / 25 May 2018

How Jackie Spinner's sons inspired her documentary about autism in Morocco

<http://www.chicagomag.com/city-life/May-2018/jackie-spinner-morocco-autism-documentary-dont-forget-me/>

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## News tips

Do you have a new paper coming out? Are you making a career move? Did you see a study or news story that you want to share? Send your news tips to [news@spectrumnews.org](mailto:news@spectrumnews.org).

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