

Thymus Gland Seen Cause of Many Diseases

Atlantic City (Science Service)—The mysterious thymus gland may be nothing but a trouble maker during adult life, a doctor charged here.

This ductless gland - like body is located near the lungs. It was commonly thought that the gland "disappeared" during adolescence, however, numerous criminals that have been executed were found to have large thymuses. The normal adult does not have such tissues, the Milwaukee doctor reported at the annual meeting of the American Medical Association here.

Disease Role Seen
This gland probably plays a large role in many diseases, Dr. Vaughan P. Simmons, assistant medical director of Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance company, added.

The thymus follows a rhythmic pattern - becoming larger and then smaller. It becomes smaller as it produces white cells and dumps them into the blood stream.

This gland may produce the excessive white blood cells found in leukemia, cancer of the blood, the doctor explained. It has been found that the thymus must be present in certain strains of mice, if they are to develop leukemia. If these mice have no thymus, they do not develop the blood disease even when they are given leukemia-producing viruses. The thymus probably plays the same role in the disease in humans, Dr. Simmons speculated.

Cancer Link Studied
Some people do not believe that this gland plays a part in leukemia because the thymus is small on autopsy while all the other lymphoid tissues are full of white cells, the scientist said.

The thymus apparently plays a large role in growth, including the abnormal growth of cancerous cells, he said. For instance, there is a tremendous release of mature thymic cells late in pregnancy, a period of rapid growth. This same release could be associated with other phenomena of rapid growth; the body does not know which are the demands of the unborn baby and which are those of a cancerous growth, he explained.

Dr. Simmons said that the thymus may be linked with other diseases such as pneumonia, various blood diseases, and the collagen diseases such as arthritis.

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