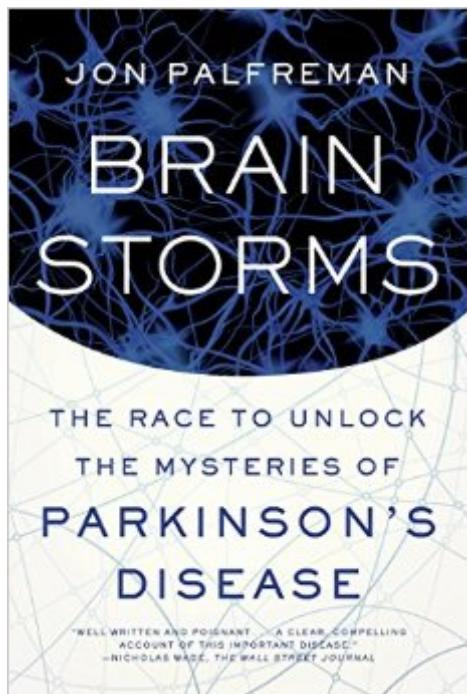


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Brain Storms: The Race To Unlock The Mysteries Of Parkinson's Disease



Synopsis

A star science journalist with Parkinson's reveals the inner workings of this perplexing disease. Seven million people worldwide suffer from Parkinson's, and doctors, researchers, and patients continue to hunt for a cure. In *Brain Storms*, the award-winning journalist Jon Palfreman tells their story, a story that became his own when he was diagnosed with the debilitating illness. Palfreman chronicles how scientists have worked to crack the mystery of what was once called the shaking palsy, from the earliest clinical descriptions of tremors, gait freezing, and micrographia to the cutting edge of neuroscience, and charts the victories and setbacks of a massive international effort to best the disease. He takes us back to the late 1950s and the discovery of L-dopa. He delves into a number of other therapeutic approaches to this perplexing condition, from partial lobotomies and deep brain stimulation to neural grafting. And he shares inspiring stories of brave individuals living with Parkinson's, from a former professional ballet dancer who tricks her body to move freely again to a patient who cannot walk but astounds doctors when he is able to ride a bicycle with no trouble at all. With the baby boom generation beginning to retire and the population steadily aging, the race is on to discover a means to stop or reverse neurodegenerative conditions like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. *Brain Storms* is the long-overdue, riveting, and deeply personal story of that race, and a passionate, insightful, and urgent look into the lives of those affected.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Too many popular science books fall into one of two categories. On the one hand you have books that describe the science accurately, mentioning all sources of uncertainty, but then fails to convey the implications in an interesting manner. Then there are books that use the science like a drunken man uses a light post - for support rather than illumination. Such books can give you a gripping story and then a few references are thrown in to make the story seem credible, but they fail to explain the science behind the story. This book finds the perfect sweet-spot in that it describes the in an intriguing but fair manner while also continually reminding the reader what the science means for the reader - whether that is someone afflicted with Parkinson or someone who is just interested in the disease. The story is told in a chronological manner, beginning with James Parkinson who first described the syndrome/disease that now bears his name. In the 1960s, more than a century after, came the first effective treatments for the disease. Levadopa (L-Dopa), a dopamine pre-cursor, showed promising results at first. What I didn't know is that in the first blind study there was no difference between patients receiving Levadopa, and the group receiving a placebo. It was only after some tinkering with the doses that Levadopa became the main drug for alleviating symptoms that it is today. Palfreman's who himself has Parkinson writes about all the different approaches to curing or alleviating Parkinson, including, L-dopa, neural grafting, deep brain stimulation, growth factors, and viral destruction of misfolded proteins. The stories for these treatments can appear, and often are rather repetitive.

If you are a Parkinson's patient seeking a usable understanding of how to approach the disease, this book will be of only limited value toward that end. If, however, you are interested in reading various stories of scientific researchers uncovering information about the disease that are of possible *future* significance, you will find a number of such stories in these pages. Like the author, I am not myself a medical researcher, but as a close family member has the disease, I've done a lot of digging and analysis. In the course of those investigations, I've developed a clear impression that a self-feeding autoimmune process of neuroinflammation plays a central role in the illness. This is not just my own opinion; there are all sorts of research papers that introduce the topic of Parkinson's with phrases like "During the last two decades, a wealth of animal and human studies has implicated inflammation-derived oxidative stress and cytokine-dependent neurotoxicity in the progressive degeneration of the dopaminergic nigrostriatal pathway, the hallmark of Parkinson's disease (PD)." So it was disappointing to find that inflammation was not highlighted in Palfreman's book. In fact, when he deals with alpha-synuclein, he leaves off the more recent findings that alpha-synuclein triggers an immune response (from microglia) which then proceed to do the actual

damage to dopaminergic neurons (as opposed to the alpha-synuclein damaging them directly). And also, that damaged neurons release alpha-synuclein into the environment around those neurons, further stimulating microglia to continue their attacks, thus leading to a self-feeding process in which neurons continue to die.

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