

Popular Science

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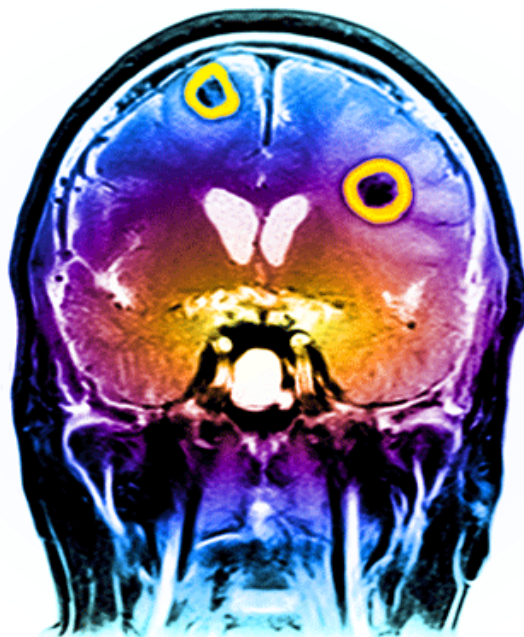
Last Call?

By Natalie Angier

The most definitive study yet could finally determine whether cellphone use causes cancer

Nearly five decades ago, Americans learned that one of their most treasured habits—smoking—was lethal. This year, we could get more scary news, when scientists announce the results from Interphone, the largest-ever study to investigate whether cellphones cause cancer.

Interphone researchers are pooling and analyzing the results gathered from studies on 6,400 tumors sampled from patients in 13 countries. If the final results mirror the preliminary ones, the world's three billion cellphone users might want to dial back their talk time. Israeli researchers participating in Interphone found that people who use cellphones regularly are 50 percent more likely than non-users to develop brain tumors. And a joint Interphone analysis from the U.K., Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland reported a 40 percent increase in tumor risk in people who use cellphones for more than a decade; the study found no discernible risk for people who have used cellphones for fewer than 10 years.



Head-Sick: Cancer-related brain tumors (yellow-ringed areas) can take up to a decade to develop. Living Art Enterprises/Photo Researchers

No one yet knows specifically how cellphones could cause cancer. The radiation they emit has too little energy to cause genetic damage, but some scientists believe that it may have indirect effects that cause cells to proliferate uncontrollably. But there's no consensus on these theories.

Scientists like David Carpenter, the director of the Institute

for Health and the Environment at the University of Albany, who spoke about cellphone risks at a Congressional subcommittee hearing in September, are looking to Interphone for a definitive ruling on cellphone safety but have expressed frustration over the two-years-delayed results. An answer from Interphone is crucial for public health, Carpen-

ter says. Although a handful of looks at the influence of both tween cellphones and cancer? studies have been published on short- and long-term use. That's Will we find ourselves dependent cellphones over the past few not to say that the study is per- on land lines again? Unlikely. years, most have been statisti- fect. Interphone defines "regular" The technology is probably here cally useless. For one thing, they use as one call, once a week. It's to stay, says Siegal Sadetzki, who surveyed too few people. Addi- possible that this definition un- ran the Israeli Interphone study: tionally, the majority of studies derestimates the risk to people "We know that there are car acci- focused on the effects of cell- who use cellphones more fre- dents, and we still use vehicles, phone use after several years, but quently. right? We've just learned how to in most cases brain cancer takes a And what happens if Inter- do it wisely." decade to develop. Interphone phone reveals a definite link be-