

Twin Matters

A Family Newsletter from the Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry (MATR)

Greetings MATR Families

Whew, what a whirlwind 2020 has been so far! Like the rest of the world, we are dealing with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic but are committed to doing our best to press on and stay connected with our MATR community! While we all do our part to maintain social distancing and stay home when we can, we hope to bring a little diversion to your day with our spring newsletter. We are excited to have results to share with you from the “Just for Fun” survey we sent out at the end of last year. We thoroughly enjoyed seeing the responses everyone gave! Also, please make sure we have your current email address (visit here: go.vcu.edu/matupdate) so we can send you invitations to upcoming online surveys – one possibly related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as well as a general health survey we hope to launch later this year. Take care and reach out to let us know how you are hanging in there and adapting to your new normal!

Judy L. Silberg

Judy Silberg, PhD
MATR Scientific Director

Know Twins?

We are always looking for new twins and higher order multiples to join the MATR community. If you have family or friends who are multiples or are the parents of multiples please invite them to visit our website matr.vcu.edu where they can read about the MATR and join online.

Twin Shenanigans

Confused...or being kind? Probably a bit of both! We imagine many parents of twins are familiar with this type of experience...

When we were about 4 or 5 years old, my twin sister and I decided it would be hilarious to try and trick our own parents into mixing us up. We decided to switch our pajamas (which were bright pink with Barbie on them, but with slightly different colors), put on one of each color sock (I believe I wore yellow normally and she wore orange), and then we put pillows in front of our feet; this was to hide the fact that I was taller than my twin. To this day, my parents insist they were confused and could not tell us apart for a split second, but I am not so sure. I think they tell us this to make us feel better about trying to switch, because I doubt they would have ever confused us. I was considerably bigger than my sister, so I don't think my parents really mixed us up. -*Story shared by Leor C. Note – minor edits may have been made to the original story.*



One Big Boy...or...Not?

From ultrasound - It's one big boy! - To delivery - It's twin girls! One pair's story about their very surprising arrival and the twin bond that continues...



My sister and I were a surprise after a doctor misread the ultrasound and proclaimed, “it's one big boy!” Growing up, we enjoyed playing together and confusing our teachers. We even went to the same college, Virginia Tech, and were both Religion and Culture majors. Although we have now parted our ways, I am at Columbia Theological Seminary and my twin is at Princeton Theological Seminary, we continue to have the same interests and hobbies. Even now, I get asked if my sister would feel it if I got hurt and if twin telepathy really works.

We have yet to find out if we are identical or fraternal, although both of us are eager to learn. We have enjoyed twin life and cannot imagine not having a look-alike playmate and best friend. - *Story shared by Rachel S. Note – minor edits may have been made to the original story.*



ATTN: We Need Your Email Address

Please share your email with us at go.vcu.edu/matupdate to receive invitations for upcoming MATR surveys (including a possible Coronavirus/COVID19 survey). Sharing your email enters you into a raffle for \$10 Target gift cards.

Just for Fun: The Twinning Experience Survey Results

Over the years, many of you have told us how curious you are to know about the experiences of other twins. With that in mind, we designed the *Twinning Experience Survey*. In December 2019, we launched the survey and over 1,000 adult twins and parents of twins took part! Below summarizes some of the answers participants gave about their twin experience. We hope you enjoy!

Are MATR Twins Alike?

Or Are They Different?



76%

played the same sports as kids



61%

have similar hobbies



49%

have the same favorite animal



53%

have different styles or fashion



54%

have different favorite foods

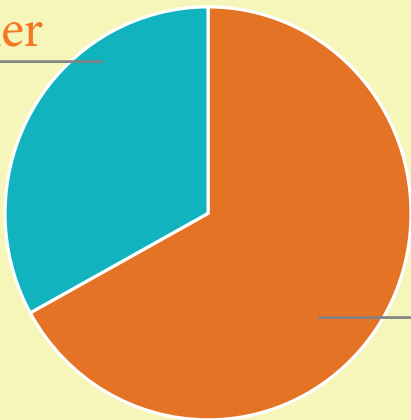


82%

have different favorite colors

Are twins kept together or apart in school?

Together
33%



Apart
67%

Nearly 60% of twins have shared a special twin language

Twins report being born **9** minutes apart on average

More than half of twins have switched places before...



...and most of them actually got away with it!

Identical

twins are most commonly told apart by what they wear. The second most common way is using birthmarks, moles, scars, veins, or freckles.



8 out of 10



twins have been dressed alike by their parents.

Fraternal

twins are less likely to share favorite color, food, hobby, or style than identical twins.



Opposite-sex

twins are most likely to have different personalities.



First-born twins are

1 1/2

times more likely to be the dominant twin.



Favorite

part about being a twin?
The bond they share.



Worst

part about being a twin?
Being compared to each other.

The ABCD Study Continues...

We are pleased to announce that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has approved continued funding for the critical data collection efforts of this study for seven more years! Following twin families longitudinally was always a study aim, but now it's official that the funding will be there to support this incredible research effort. Due to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, VCU researchers are currently unable to bring research participants to VCU for follow up visits. They are however, continuing to conduct follow up interviews by phone and using online applications, such as video calls. Research staff at the VCU ABCD site are in close contact with the ABCD Study Consortium management team and will have plans in place for resuming the on-site study visits for twins once it is safe to do so.

Twin Breast Cancer Study (TBC)

We are pleased to be collaborative partners with Dr. Mack and his study team on this important research topic. We consider understanding breast cancer risk to be of such importance that we invited as many adult, female twins as possible to learn more about Dr. Mack's vital research effort. Approximately 16,000 female twins were sent varying forms of study invitations (brochures, emails, and letters) and some twins received follow up phone calls from us as well.

We really appreciate those that took the time to respond and an extra big thank you to those who have gone on to be part of the study itself. We also realize for many of you that have lost family members to breast cancer, this was particularly poignant for you, so we just want to acknowledge that and let you know that we and the study team are grateful to you for sharing your stories with us and in some cases being able to participate in the study as well. There have also been those of you that, even in the midst of dealing with recent breast cancer diagnoses, have reached back out to us to see if you are now eligible for the study; thank-you!

The study is still enrolling twins so feel free to check with us about study eligibility.

Psoriasis & Psoriatic Arthritis in Twins

Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis (PATS) is another area of research we are pleased to support. It investigates factors that influence psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, particularly one that is garnering increasing interest – the human microbiome. This is the third microbiome project we have had the privilege of being involved with and we are increasingly fascinated by the impact the microbiome has on human health. We sent study invitations to approximately 1100 twins (550 pairs) and received information back from around 155 twins. Thank you to all who responded to our contacts—we really appreciate the time you took to do so – as you can see, every response matters! An extra shout-out of thanks to those that have given their time to the study staff! We look forward to learning and sharing with you what the study analysis will uncover in time.

Can Dogs Tell Twins Apart?

A study out of the Czech Republic suggests yes! Research on this subject has taken place for the last half-century; however, more recent studies have provided better evidence that dogs can indeed tell identical and fraternal sets of twins apart by scent alone. The researchers conducting the study* in the Czech Republic used police dogs with high levels of training and took samples swabbed from the belly buttons of sets of identical and fraternal twins. Using 10 different German Shepherds and 12 separate tests, the dogs picked the correct match for the swab every time! They were able to distinguish between the twins despite the fact that the twins came from the same household environment and ate the same foods before the study. This just goes to show how hard it is to trick a dog's nose!

*Visit go.vcu.edu/twinnews for a link to this research

The MATR Appreciates You!

We admire the willingness of MATR twins to do their part to help further discovery about human health and behavior. Wanting to help others is often one of the main reasons given when MATR twins are asked why they participate in research. Since you are so generous with your time, we wanted a more concrete way to say thank-you. Starting in the spring of 2016, we began completing periodic, random drawings for tokens of our appreciation such as VISA or store gift cards.

Recipients of our drawings include folks that range from long-time MATR participants, like Audrey M. – MATR member since the 1980's (!) to newer participants, like Courtney T. – who joined the MATR community in 2019.

Some winners, like Brianna R. who recently joined in 2019, shared some words with us. She "...love[s] being a mom of twins..." and is excited "...to be able to be part of MATR and have the opportunity to participate in unique twin related studies."

Kathryn T., MATR member since about 2005, shared thoughts that we suspect many other adult twins might recognize in themselves..." It's funny how even though I am not living in the same city I feel like my twin sister is with me. That said, it's easy in the hustle and bustle of work, kids and everyday life that I sometimes forget how special we are. Being identical twins, we get looks and get questioned a lot when we are together but when we aren't together I tend to forget how blessed we are to have each other and the special bond we have. MATR is that reminder. I love reading up on interesting stories and studies about other twins." ...and we at the MATR are happy to be able to share these updates and stories with you all!