RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI’S BRAIN IMAGING CENTER ARE WORKING HARD TO UNLOCK THE MYSTERIES OF A RARE DISORDER.

PKU, A GENETIC CONDITION THAT AFFECTS 1 IN 15,000 NEWBORNS, CAUSES A PARTICULAR AMINO ACID TO BUILD UP IN THE BODY. LEFT UNTREATED, IT CAN LEAD TO BRAIN DAMAGE, INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND SEIZURES.

WHILE PKU SYMPTOMS ARE WELL-STUDIED AMONG NEWBORNS, IT IS LESS KNOWN HOW PKU AFFECTS GROWING ADULTS. SHAWN CHRIST, THE DIRECTOR OF THE BRAIN IMAGING CENTER, SAYS THE CENTER IS CURRENTLY RESEARCHING HOW PKU AFFECTS ADULTS AS THEY GROW OLDER.

“We know so very little about what it means to get older with PKU, and so if we can identify early markers in the brain that may foreshadow potential difficulties in every-day life, we can step in and look at interventions.”

CHRIST ADDED THAT INDIVIDUALS WITH PKU COULD HAVE DIFFICULTIES PLANNING, ORGANIZING OR PROCESSING INFORMATION. HOWEVER, IN THE 20 YEARS CHRIST HAS SPENT STUDYING PKU, THERE HAS BEEN GREAT PROGRESS WITH BOTH DIAGNOSING AND TREATING THOSE WITH PKU.

“It’s been a very exciting time in the last 10-15 years with some really incredible advancements in the treatment of PKU.”

THIS RESEARCH EFFORT IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL PKU ALLIANCE, WHOSE MISSION IS TO FIND A CURE FOR PKU AND HELP THOSE SUFFERING FROM THE DISORDER.

I’M CAILIN RILEY, WITH A MIZZOU SPOTLIGHT ON SCIENCE.