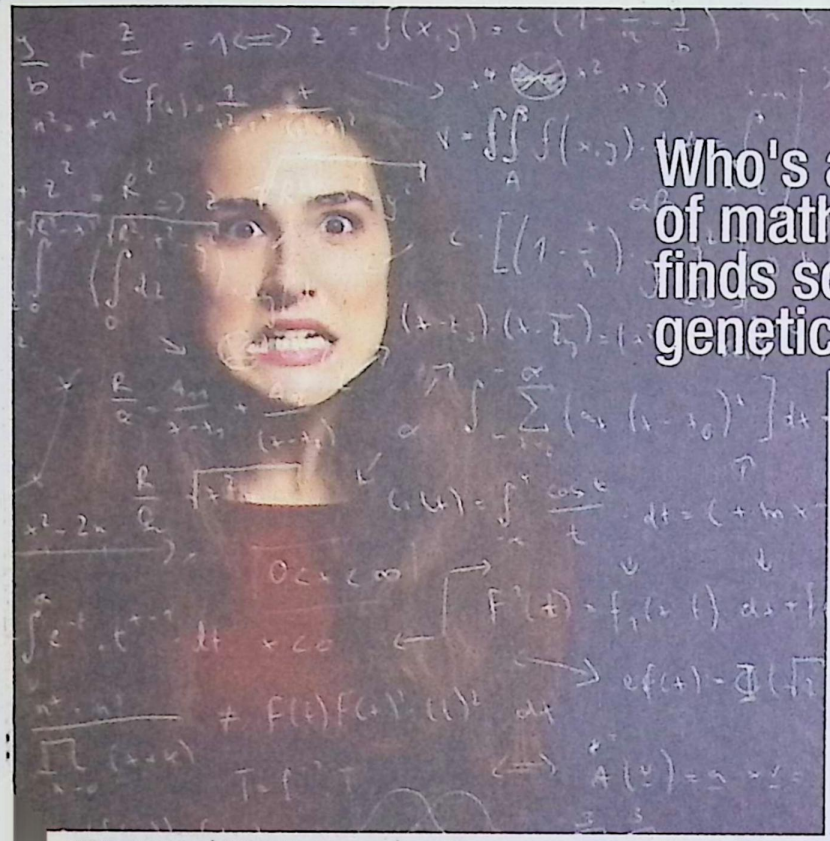


Who's afraid of math? Study finds some genetic factors

Escherichia coli (E. coli). PHOTO COURTESY: ASTON UNIVERSITY

A new study of math anxiety shows how some people may be at greater risk to fear math not only because of negative experiences, but also because of genetic risks related to both general anxiety and math skills.

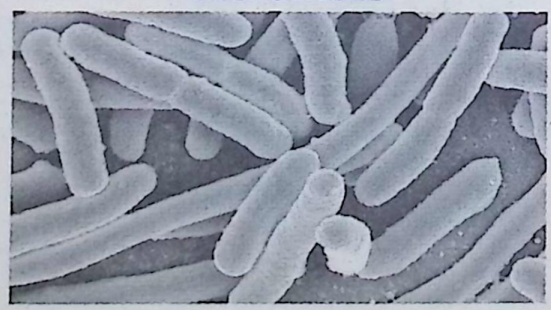
The study, which examined how fraternal and identical twins differ on measures of math anxiety, provides a revised view on why some children – and adults – may develop a fear of math that makes it more difficult for them to solve math problems and succeed in school.

"We found that math anxiety taps into genetic predispositions in two ways: people's cognitive performance on math and their tendency toward anxiety," wrote Zhe Wang, lead author of the study and postdoctoral researcher in psychology at The Ohio State University.

The results don't mean that math anxiety can be blamed solely or even mostly on genetic factors, the researchers emphasised. In this study, genetic factors explained about 40 percent of the individual differences in math anxiety. Much of the rest was explained by the different environments – in the school, in the home and elsewhere – that the twins experienced.

The study appears online in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

Dropped your toast? Five-second food rule exists



Food picked up just a few seconds after being dropped is less likely to contain bacteria than if it is left for longer periods of time, according to the findings of research carried out at Aston University's School of Life and Health Sciences.

The findings suggest there may be some scientific basis to the '5 second rule' – the urban myth about it being fine to eat food that has only had contact with the floor for five seconds or less. Although people have long followed the five second rule, until now it was unclear whether it actually helped.

The study, undertaken by final year Biology students and led by Anthony Hilton, Professor of Microbiology at Aston University, monitored the transfer of the common bacteria *Escherichia coli* (E. coli) and *Staphylococcus aureus* from a variety of indoor floor types (carpet, laminate and tiled surfaces) to toast, pasta, biscuit and a sticky sweet when contact was made from 3 to 30 seconds.