

## Dear Family,

Our class is learning about the immune system and autoimmune diseases. Here are a few facts we've learned:

- There are **more than 100 autoimmune diseases**. Some that you might know are multiple sclerosis, type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, celiac disease, lupus, and psoriasis.
- **Fifty million** Americans suffer from autoimmune diseases; **75%** are women.
- Autoimmune diseases occur when the **immune system attacks the host body** and doesn't stop.
- Autoimmune diseases **tend to run in families**, but they are **not passed on genetically**; oftentimes an **environmental trigger** is what unleashes an autoimmune disease.

In class, your child is working on a special project about autoimmune diseases to go with the theme of Linking Together for a Cure:

- Grades 3–4 students are making **mobiles**. Each student will select a paper link from a bag and then learn more about the disease listed. He or she will then report the findings on different pieces of the mobile. Finally, students will link the paper strips and display their mobiles.
- Grades 5–6 students are **writing and performing a live interview of an expert** on an autoimmune disease. Each child will select a paper link from a bag and then learn more about the disease listed. Next, he or she will pair up with another student, taking turns being the interviewer and the expert on a television show called *Linking With the Experts*. Finally, pairs will present their interviews to the class.
- Grades 7–8 students are **creating proposals for an online web series** on the Medical Links Channel. Each student will select a paper link from a bag and then learn more about the disease listed. Small groups will create shows modeled after familiar television and web series.

All of these projects build important, grade-specific skills that involve researching, planning, writing, and making presentations.

**Ask your child about his or her project, following up with questions like these to support the learning:**

- Which disease are you researching? What have you learned about it so far?
- Have you run across any words or concepts that you don't understand or that are new to you? (Investigate these with your child.)
- What new words have you learned?
- What is the most interesting fact that you've learned about the disease? Why?
- What else would you like to know about the disease? How would living with it affect your life?
- What do you think researchers should study further?

Think about those you know with autoimmune diseases. Do you know anyone with this particular disease or other autoimmune diseases? Share what you know with your child. If you note a number of autoimmune diseases in your family, make a list to share with your family doctor on your next visit. Being aware of autoimmune diseases is important!

As always, if you have any questions about these projects, please feel free to contact me. **To learn more about autoimmune diseases, visit the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association website at [aarda.org](http://aarda.org).**

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PS: Did you know that the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association hosts an annual fundraising walk to raise money for research and education? To learn more about Linking Together for a Cure, visit [autoimmunewalk.org](http://autoimmunewalk.org).