

## **An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation**

Dear Member,

For those of us who have discovered “The Gym” as an aid to our weight control, and who have been taught to do our stretching exercises, a recent number of the BMJ held a shock. Herbert and Gabriel showed that stretching before or after exercise does not protect against muscle soreness, nor does stretching before exercise reduce the rate of injury. (*BMJ*. 2002;**325**:468-70) Well, at least the time saved can now be more usefully employed propping up the bar. On a more serious note, you may remember that, in Newsletter No 25, I discussed the outbreak of West Nile virus in New York. This virus is now becoming endemic in North America, having recently been reported in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and now even in Canada. There have been 10 cases in the USA following blood transfusion and one confirmed in Canada.

### **Curtains and Leishmaniasis.**

Curtains impregnated with pyrethroid insecticides provide good protection against the indoor transmission of cutaneous leishmaniasis. A trial in Venezuela showed that there were no cases in the households using such curtains, whereas there was an incidence of 9% in those that did not. (*BMJ*. 2002;**325**:810-1)

### **Diet Control.**

A newly isolated hormone, PYY3-36, which is released from the cells that line the gut, seems to control the nerves which trigger the desire to eat. In a recent experiment volunteers, who had been injected with PYY3-36, helped themselves to a third less food from a free buffet over a period of 12 hours than did controls. (*Nature*. 2002;**73**:167-72)

### **Drug Resistant HIV.**

Resistance to antiretroviral drugs in the USA has increased from 3.4% in 1995-8 to 12.4% in 1999-2000. Of those people who had become drug resistant, 75% were resistant to all the 3 classes of antiretroviral drugs. The patients were predominantly white, non-Hispanic men with a median age of 35. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 2002;**347**:385-94)

### **Genetic Tendency to Breast Cancer.**

Many people believe that women who carry the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes have a high risk of developing breast cancer. Previous studies have shown such a risk, but a recent review reports that the estimates have been markedly inflated because women who carry the mutation are more likely to have other risk factors. No estimates should be made until the complex issue has been totally elucidated. (*J.Nat.Cancer Inst.* 2002;**94**:1221-6)

### **Hand-Rubbing and Hand-Washing.**

Hand rubbing with an alcohol-based solution is significantly more efficient in reducing contamination than hand washing with antiseptic soap. Girou reports much lower bacterial counts in the hand-rubbing arm of a recent trial. Is this because we spend too little time actually washing our hands? (*BMJ*. 2002;**325**:362-4)

### **Motion Sickness.**

An excellent review of the subject suggests the use of scopolamine for severe cases and over-the-counter remedies for mild to moderate. Ginger supplements and acupuncture to the wrists is supported by promising, but inconsistent data, and awaits confirmation by controlled clinical trials. (*J.Trav.Med.* 2002;**9**(5):251-6)

### **Iron Supplementation in Children.**

Iron deficiency in children, especially in the tropics, has frequently not been corrected because of fears of increasing the risk of precipitating infection. A survey by Gera and Sachdev has revealed that, with the exception of a slight increase in the incidence of diarrhoea, there was no evidence that iron supplementation has any harmful effect on the overall incidence of infectious illness in children. They conclude that iron fortification of food could well be the safest method of supplementation among children. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2000;**325**:1142-4)

### **Rate or Rhythm.**

The standard treatment for atrial fibrillation has been, for many years, the use of drugs or procedures to restore normal cardiac rhythm. Two recent studies have shown that it is as effective, and much cheaper, to control the heart rate using digitalis, beta-blockers and calcium channel blockers. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 2002;**347**:1825-33 & 1834-40)

### **Genetic Malarial Resistance.**

There is a receptor protein on the surface of red blood cells, which acts as a docking site for a protein expressed on the surface of the malarial parasite. The interaction between these two proteins facilitates the entry of the parasite into the red blood cell. A recent survey, which has been prepublished online at [www.naturemedicine/DOI10.1038/nm807](http://www.naturemedicine/DOI10.1038/nm807), has shown that 47% of the population of Papua New Guinea has a mutation of the gene, which encodes for the red cell protein. The resultant mutant protein will not facilitate the entry of the malarial parasite and so these people are immune. The authors propose that this mutation is compelling evidence of natural selection. (*Nature Medicine.* 9<sup>th</sup> December 2002)

### **Better Health means Better National Football Teams.**

If you want to see how statistics can be made to prove anything, read a recent paper in which Appleby and Street compared countries FIFA ranking with the WHO health statistics for that country. This is a really good Christmas spoof, but with a real message. ([www2.york.ac.uk/inst/che/street.htm](http://www2.york.ac.uk/inst/che/street.htm) and *J.Health Service Research & Policy.* 2002;**6**:220-5)

### **Finding Old Colleagues.**

Have you ever wondered where those people with whom you did your house jobs have ended up? Well wonder no more as you can visit [www.nhscolleaguesreunited.com](http://www.nhscolleaguesreunited.com), which promises to put old friends in touch by searching over 70,000 NHS departments by name, hospital, county and community service. Now there is no excuse for failing to send them a Christmas card.

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