

From the Library

"Despite our success, plenty of detractors voiced their opinions on Internet chat rooms and in letters to the editor. I've heard all the ridiculous assumptions. "Now that a blind guy's climbed it everyone's going to want to climb it. They're going to think it's easy. People will get hurt." "Why are people thinking this is such a big deal? Anyone can be short roped to the top by nineteen Seeing Eye guides." My teammates constantly came to my rescue with carefully crafted comebacks like—before you start sprouting a bunch of lies over a public forum, get your facts straight, dude. Don't let them get to you, Chris Mora said after I shared with him their comments. You climbed every inch of the South Col and then some. I knew he was right. There was some who would never be content, others who still had no idea what to think, but many others for whom the climb forced to higher expectation of their own possibilities. I don't climb mountains to prove to anyone that blind people can do this or that. I climb for the same reason an artist paints a picture: because it brings me great joy." (Weihenmayer, Erik. *Touch The Top of the World. A Blind Man's Journey to Climb Farther Than the Eye Can See*. New York: Dutton, 2001:341)

It is well recognised that cranial irradiation early in life may have long term effects on intellectual development. In Newcastle, UK, a cross sectional study of 17 leukaemic patients and their sibling controls was used to assess the merit of neuropsychological development of attention. In this study, children with leukaemia who did not receive cranial irradiation as part of their treatment did not exhibit the attentional deficits that have been reported in previous cohorts who were treated with irradiation. Their intellectual development was comparable to their unaffected siblings. (*Archives of Diseases of Childhood* 2003;**88**:147–50)

It is unclear whether dietary alterations may have an effect on the risk of Alzheimer's disease. In a study from Chicago of 815 community residents aged 65 years and older it would appear that the high intake of unsaturated, unhydrogenated fats may be protective against Alzheimer's disease, whereas intake of saturated or trans-unsaturated fats may actually increase the risk. No relation between dietary cholesterol intake and Alzheimer's disease was documented. (*Archives of Neurology* 2003;**60**:194–200)

A report from the World Health Organization suggests that the annual global cancer rate may increase by 50% from 10 million cases in 2000 to 15 million new cases by 2020. The report also emphasises there is clear evidence that as many as one third of cancer cases worldwide could be prevented through lifestyle changes and public health measures instituted by governments. The predicted surge in new cases will mostly be the result of the steadily ageing population in both developed and developing countries and the increasing adoption of unhealthy lifestyles. (Go to: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2003/pr27/en/>)

The rapidly increasing incidence of type 2 diabetes continues to be a major health concern in many countries. Results from the multinational nutritional study suggest that increased animal fat intake is associated with the development of type 2 diabetes. Other factors that were associated with increased risk for type 2 diabetes were little exercise, sedentary professions, low carbohydrate intake, and high total fat intake. (*Diabetes Care* 2003;**26**:302–7)

A large vaccination programme to protect against smallpox is under way in the United States. By the end of March 350 000 military personnel had been vaccinated. Twenty nine developed ocular vaccinia as the result of autoinoculation. Two of 300 000 civilian vaccinees had also developed ocular vaccinia. There is concern that a wide scale vaccination campaign might result in substantial numbers of ocular vaccinia cases. (*MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2003;**52**:281)

Declining cognitive function is a growing health concern for elderly adults. The prevalence of age associated memory impairment in the general older population is estimated to be 17–34%. Findings from the placebo controlled clinical trial, WHIMS, a study of women aged 65 or older from 39 clinical centres, has now documented that oestrogen plus progestin did not improve cognitive function when taken on a routine basis. Moreover, a small increased risk of clinically meaningful cognitive decline occurred in the group of women taking oestrogen plus progestin versus the placebo group. (*JAMA* 2003;**289**:2663–72)

Moles or melanocytic naevi are both markers of increased risk for the development of cutaneous melanoma. A study from Boston suggests that the annual transformation rate of any single mole to a melanoma is in the range of 0.0005% or less for both men and women younger than 40 years of age but 0.003% for men older than 60 years of age. This appears to be because moles may disappear and ones that persist into an old age have an increased risk of malignant degeneration. Nevertheless, systematic excision of benign apparent lesions would appear to be of limited benefit in preventing melanoma. (*Archives of Dermatology* 2003;**139**:282–8)

Chronic diseases involving the putamen and globus pallidus induce parkinsonism and other movement disorders. Until recently the clinical picture associated with isolated infarction of the lenticular nucleus was less well established. As a part of the Lausanne stroke registry, 13 patients with pure lenticular infarction were studied. In these patients the main manifestation of lenticular infarction was hemiparesis but with no movement disorder. Of interest to ophthalmologists was the prominence of a hemivisual neglect associated with these infarctions. (*Archives of Neurology* 2003;**60**:351–5)

The possibility that multiple sclerosis is related to an infectious aetiological agent has been considered for some time. Recent proposals have suggested that *Chlamydia pneumoniae* might be a possible aetiological agent for the development of multiple sclerosis. In a nested case-control design in the Nurses Health Study serum samples were tested for CPN specific immunoglobulin G antibodies for chlamydia infection. In this study there was a positive correlation between chlamydial infection as detected by CPN specific immunoglobulin G antibodies and progressive multiple sclerosis. (*Epidemiology* 2003;**14**:141–7)

Researchers from the National Institute of Dental and Cranial Facial Research in Bethesda, MD, have recently reported that baby teeth when shed contain one to two dozen stem cells. Moreover, these stem cells under proper conditions can be transformed into bone fat and neural cells, a key characteristic of embryonic stem cells. These findings were published in the April 25 online edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. (Go to: <http://www.pnas.org/>)



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