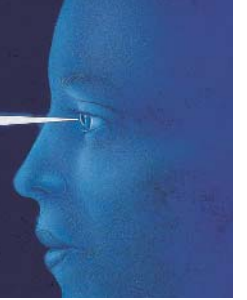


# From the Library



"Last year, approaching Vienna after a fifteen-year absence, I passed through Blindenmarkt—in English Blind Market, as one might say Slave Market—a place whose existence I have never previously suspected. The name struck me like a whiplash and has stayed with me since. This year, arriving in Marrakesh, I suddenly found myself among the blind. There were hundreds of them, more than one could count, most of them beggars. A group of them, sometimes eight, sometimes ten, sit close together in a row in the market, and their hoarse, endlessly repeated chant was audible a long way off. I stood in front of them, as still as they were, and was never quite sure whether they sensed my presence. Each man held out a wooden alms dish, and when someone tossed something in the proffered coin passed from hand to hand, each man feeling it, each man testing it, before one of them, whose office it was, finally put in a pouch. They felt together, just as they murmured and called together. (Canetti, Elias. *The Voices of Marrakesh*. New York: Marion Boyars, 2001:24)

Antioxidants continue to be advocated for the prevention of many illnesses despite the fact that well controlled studies showing their usefulness are relatively few. A study of dementia from the Johns Hopkins University has been completed. In this study elderly residents of one county were assessed from 1995 to 1997. In those subjects who routinely used vitamins E and C as supplements in combinations there was a reduced prevalence of dementia. A trend towards a lower dementia prevalence risk was also evident in users of vitamin E and multiple vitamins containing C. There was no protective effect with the use of vitamin C or vitamin E supplements alone, or with vitamin B complex supplements. It appears that the use of vitamins E and C supplements in combination may reduce the prevalence of incidence of dementia. (*Archives of Neurology* 2004;**61**: 82–8)

Despite the growing body of evidence of the importance of routine exercise especially as one gets older, the vast majority of the population of the developed world does not heed this recommendation. In a randomised controlled trial from Duke University sedentary overweight men and women with mild to moderate dyslipidaemia were studied. In the non-dieting overweight subjects who did not exercise, weight gain was routinely documented. In

contrast, both low exercise groups and high exercise groups lost weight and fat in a dose-response manner. These findings strongly suggest that without changes in a diet a greater amount of activity is necessary for weight maintenance and that a positive calorie imbalance in overweight subjects can be reversed by a moderate amount of exercise. For most individuals this can be accomplished by walking 30 minutes a day. (*Archives of Internal Medicine* 2004;**164**:31–9)

Scientists from Germany have identified the three genes in mosquitoes that control how the insect's immune system responds to the malarial parasite. These findings may lead to a new antimalarial strategy by using the mosquitoes' own immune system to block transmission of the infection from mosquitoes to humans. (*Science* 2004;**303**:2030–2)

Scientists have long suspected that the protein clumps identified by Alzheimer in 1907 are somehow related to the disease that bears his name. Researchers have now identified an even smaller form of protein, one that apparently produces memory deficits merely by binding to neurons and disrupting their ability to transmit signals. These tiny proteins or ADDLs may be blocked by an antibody and thus prevent the damage caused by neuronal loss characteristic of Alzheimer's disease. (*Scientific American* 2004;**290**:26–7)

Despite their fat content nuts are now in—that is, in most healthy diet recommendations. Substituting walnuts for monounsaturated fat in a Mediterranean diet has been reported to reduce concentrations of total cholesterol, including low density lipoprotein, and it also improved endothelium dependent vasodilation in people with high cholesterol. This may be the explanation of the apparent cardioprotective effect of nut intake. (*Circulation* 2004;**109**:1609–14)

Osteoarthritis continues to contribute greatly to the disability of ageing populations of the developed world. Currently, little is known about the underlying biological events leading to this disorder. A new public-private partnership between the National Institutes of Health and the pharmaceutical industry has been established to investigate the risk factors for developing osteoarthritis. Biological specimens, images, and clinical data will be

collected from men and women aged 45 years or older at risk for developing osteoarthritis or those with an early stage of the disease. It is hoped that scientists will be able to identify new biological markers that indicate bone or cartilage changes which may help in the treatment of osteoarthritis. (Go to: [www.oai.ucsf.edu/clinics.asp](http://www.oai.ucsf.edu/clinics.asp))

Owing to the morbidity associated with cardiopulmonary bypass cardiac surgeons are increasingly performing coronary artery bypass procedures off-pump. Concerns have been raised about the technical difficulty of off-pump bypass surgery and whether or not the outcomes are equivalent to the more accepted on-pump technique. In a randomised single surgeon trial among unselected patients undergoing coronary artery bypass grafting cardiac outcomes and health related quality of life at 30 days and 1 year were similar in patients who underwent surgery off-pump and those who had surgery on-pump. The authors suggest however that a larger multicentre trial is necessary to evaluate the generalised ability of these results and to better clarify the role of off-pump coronary artery bypass surgery. (*JAMA* 2004;**291**:1841–9)

The grey short tailed South American opossum is now a targeted animal for genome sequencing. Although opossums and humans diverged from a common ancestor more than 130 million years ago opossum genetic information will be useful for comparative studies in other mammals, particularly mice. Moreover, the short tailed South American opossum is the only laboratory animal known in which ultraviolet radiation alone can cause melanoma. It may provide genetic information to enable us learn how sun exposure leads to skin cancer in humans. (Go to [www.nhgr.nih.gov](http://www.nhgr.nih.gov))

Although classic teaching has asserted that dyslexia is more common in boys than girls recent studies have questioned this. However, in the Dunedin (New Zealand) multidisciplinary health and development study reading disabilities were seen more frequently in boys than in girls. The authors suggest that these epidemiological data should prompt research to determine the causal influences that underlie this sex difference, because elucidation could throw light on the process leading to reading disability in the sexes. (*JAMA* 2004;**291**:2007–12)



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