

MINERVA

Italians who add dark chocolate to their Mediterranean diet may have even more to celebrate when it comes to the wellbeing of their hearts. A study of healthy Italians reports that regular consumption of dark chocolate is associated with low serum concentrations of C reactive protein. Researchers found a J shaped relation between eating dark chocolate and serum concentrations of the protein, with the levels lowest in moderate consumers (a 20 gram serving every three days). Small doses of chocolate may reduce inflammation and may confer cardiovascular protection (*Journal of Nutrition* 2008;138:1939-45).

Roll up, roll up for a rumbustious rendition of Shostakovich's Festival Overture, Brahms's piano concerto No 1, and Sibelius's symphony No 5 performed by the European Doctors Orchestra at 3 pm on Sunday 9 November at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Tickets can be obtained by emailing box.office@ram.ac.uk or calling the Royal Academy's Box Office on 020 7873 7300.

A retrospective analysis of patients who underwent plastic surgery under general anaesthetic, having had bariatric surgery for obesity, finds them at high risk of pulmonary aspiration (*Anesthesia & Analgesia* 2008;107:1257-9). Despite the dramatic weight loss due to the gastric banding, pulmonary aspiration was significantly higher than in non-bariatric controls. The cause is probably the decrease in oesophageal-gastric peristalsis and impaired relaxation of the lower oesophageal sphincter brought about by the bariatric surgery.

Every year the Society for Clinical Trials and Project ImpACT (Important Achievements of Clinical Trials) select the clinical trial that has answered an important clinical or healthcare question by using the highest science and greatest courage, and which best cared for its participants. If you have been involved in a trial and wish to nominate your group for the 2008 award, please contact Dave Sackett at sackett@bmts.com by 31 January 2009.

Repentant sinners seem to be viewed more sympathetically than people with mental illness who are in remission. Upbeat and positively written leaflets about patients who



A 17 year old girl was referred for evaluation of alopecia. Clinical examination showed patchy alopecia mainly in the vertex region of her scalp. The rest of the clinical examination was normal, and the relevant investigations produced no helpful results. She denied pulling out her hair, but repeated history taking with contributions from her parents confirmed the clinical suspicion of sleep isolated trichotillomania, a condition that has been described recently.

Ajit Singh Kashyap (kashyapajits@gmail.com), doctor, department of endocrinology, **Surekha Kashyap**, doctor, Command Hospital (Central Command), Lucknow Cantt 226 002, **Kuldip Parkash Anand**, deputy director medical services, Uttar Bharat Area, Bareilly Cantt 243 001, India
Patient consent obtained.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a1858

have overcome substance misuse disorders and people who are in remission from schizophrenia were issued to 400 members of the general public. Both leaflets brought about a reduction in stigmatised attitudes, but more so towards patients who have overcome problems with substance misuse than towards people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia (*Psychiatric Bulletin* 2008;32:327-32).

Does neonates' growth rate predict their systolic and diastolic blood pressure in adult years? The answer seems to be yes. A study in *Hypertension* (2008;52:638-44) claims to be the first trial to show that only immediate postnatal growth (0 to 5 months) in term births predicts diastolic blood pressure at age 25. It adds to the growing collection of evidence that both birth weight and postnatal growth are associated with systolic blood pressure, in line with the fetal origins and growth acceleration hypotheses.

Extracorporeal photopheresis induces apoptosis of leucocytes, which when infused are thought to modulate cytokine production,

so it's considered a potential therapeutic option for patients with chronic graft versus host disease (GVHD). *Blood* (2008;112:2667-74) has published a large phase II randomised study comparing photopheresis plus standard immunosuppressive therapy versus standard therapy alone in patients with resistant skin manifestations of chronic GVHD. Photopheresis didn't significantly improve the median percentage change in the total skin score at 12 weeks, but it did allow faster reduction in steroid doses, and patients receiving photopheresis had better quality of life.

Canadian doctors are facing fewer legal actions but receive more complaints than 10 years ago, according to the *CMAJ* (2008;179:643-4). The chances of a medical member of the Canadian Medical Protective Association being named in a lawsuit has halved, but there has been a 30% rise in legal and other types of assistance provided to doctors facing complaints from the regulatory colleges. The changes may be linked to improved medical care and risk management, as well as a better understanding about patient safety.

Particulate matter air pollution is well known to be linked with cardiovascular morbidity and mortality, and the mechanism may involve ischaemia induced by the particles. In a repeated-measures study that involved almost 6000 observations on 48 patients who had had a percutaneous intervention for myocardial infarction or acute coronary syndrome without infarction, raised levels of fine particles and black carbon predicted depression of ST segment levels on the electrocardiogram. The ST depression was greatest in the first month after a cardiac event (*Circulation* 2008;118:1314-30).

What's the best regimen for someone recovering from an Achilles tendon repair? Early weight bearing after surgery improves many quality of life measures, including social, physical, and emotional domains, during the first six weeks compared with no weight bearing. But by six months, the groups were similar, and both groups had weak calf muscles. No patient had a rerupture (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* 2008;90A:1876-83).

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a1859