

MINERVA

Some epidemiological investigations have suggested a link between exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields and risk of childhood leukaemia, but no one has yet suggested a plausible biological mechanism. Perhaps the results of a large case-control study from Germany will lay the hypothesis to rest. Children living within 2 km of high powered amplitude modulated or frequency modulated radio or television transmitters were no more likely to develop leukaemia than those living more than 10 km away (*American Journal of Epidemiology* 2008;168:1169-78, doi:10.1093/aje/kwn230).

How parents talk to their adolescent children about sex, pregnancy, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases affects the likelihood that adolescents will engage in risky sexual behaviours. A qualitative study finds, unsurprisingly, that when parents were receptive, informal, and composed during such conversations, adolescents were less anxious and less avoidant. It's particularly important that adolescents don't perceive the parent to be dominating the conversation (*Journal of Adolescent Research* 2008;23:689-721, doi:10.1177/0743558408323841).

Acromegaly is complicated by an increased risk of diabetes, hypertension, colonic polyps, and cardiovascular disease. Findings from a case series investigated by polysomnography suggest that sleep apnoea should be added to this list. The condition was present in more than half the people with untreated acromegaly and although it improved with treatment, it didn't resolve completely (*European Journal of Endocrinology* 2008;159:533-40, doi:10.1530/EJE-08-0442).

As well as lowering lipid levels, statins have antithrombotic, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory properties that may be beneficial in infection. A study from Denmark found that mortality was lower among people admitted to hospital with pneumonia if they were taking statins. People taking preventive treatments may be younger, healthier, and wealthier than people not taking such treatments, but adjusting for these potential confounders did not diminish the effect (*Archives of Internal Medicine* 2008;168:2081-87, doi:10.1001/archinte.168.19.2081).

As we age, our arterial systems get stiffer, pulse pressure widens, and our cerebral



A 49 year old man was referred by his general practitioner with a pigmented lesion in the right retina on ophthalmoscopy (bottom, off centre). The patient had congenital hypertrophy of the retinal pigment epithelium, which appears as lesions resembling bear tracks on ophthalmoscopy. Patients with this condition are at risk of familial adenomatous polyposis, so they require regular endoscopic examinations. If familial adenomatous polyposis is found, total colectomy should be performed to prevent colorectal carcinoma. As this condition is autosomal dominant, family members should also be screened.

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microvasculature is exposed to the effects of increased pulsatility in blood flow. The idea that these changes might damage small blood vessels is hypothetical at present. However, a cross sectional study shows that two measures of aortic stiffness—pulse wave velocity and pulse pressure—are associated with increased numbers of white matter hyperintensities and lacunar infarcts in magnetic resonance imaging scans of the brain (*Hypertension* advance online publication 13 Oct 2008, doi:10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.108.119024).

In Sweden, where neither euthanasia nor physician assisted suicide is legal, 21 people with motor neurone disease committed suicide between 1965 and 2004. This suicide rate is about six times greater than that in the general population and much higher than that observed for other neurological diseases. The risk of suicide was greatest during the early stages of the disease (*Brain* 2008;131:2729-33, doi:10.1093/brain/awn161).

A 57 year old man receiving weekly injections of interferon beta for multiple sclerosis developed a violaceous skin eruption on his face, chest, back, arms, and knees, with associated periorbital oedema and proximal muscle weakness. A clinical diagnosis of dermatomyositis was confirmed by biopsy (*Archives of Dermatology* 2008;144:1341-9, doi:10.1001/archderm.144.10.1341). Altered interferon signalling is implicated in several autoimmune diseases, and a similar case of dermatomyositis has been reported after high dose therapy with interferon alfa for melanoma.

Doubt has persisted as to whether lowering blood pressure is as beneficial in women as in men and whether some classes of antihypertensive drug offer better protection than others. A meta-analysis of 31 trials with nearly 200 000 participants resolves the matter. Blood pressure lowering treatments do provide similar protection against major cardiovascular events in both sexes, and differences between drug regimens are not substantial (*European Heart Journal* 2008; 29:2669-80, doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehn427).

Wheeze in early childhood is complex, according to a paper in *Thorax* (2008;63:974-80, doi:10.1136/thx.2007.093187). Data from a large longitudinal study of children were used to identify six patterns of wheezing according to age of onset and frequency of symptoms. Children with intermediate (after age 18 months) or late onset (after 3.5 years) wheeze or persistent wheeze were most likely to have asthma diagnosed by age 7. The same phenotypes were associated with atopy and increased airway responsiveness.

Intensive management of diabetes carries an increased risk of severe hypoglycaemic episodes, which often occur at night and may lead to seizures. A report of four children with diabetes who were wearing continuous glucose monitoring systems when they had a nocturnal seizure finds that the seizures happened after a lengthy period of hypoglycaemia. Although readings from continuous sensors lag behind blood glucose concentrations, these devices have the potential to prevent nocturnal seizures (*Diabetes Care* 2008; 31:2110-2, doi:10.2337/dc08-0863).

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