



A 13 week old boy with noisy breathing
Try the picture quiz in
ENDGAMES, p 785

People who think about their thinking may have a larger than average volume of grey brain matter just behind their eyes. The ability to introspect varies, and scientists have now linked it with the anterior prefrontal cortex of the brain. The structure of the white matter in the same region is also connected to introspection. The discovery could help explain why some head injuries affect the individual's ability to reflect on their own thoughts and actions and to understand their own conditions. More investigation is needed into how many of these differences are anatomical and how many can be influenced by training (*Science* 2010;329:1541-3, doi:10.1126/science.1191883).

First it was smoking and drinking, and then it was being too thin. Now there's a new risk factor for pre-term birth: it's untreated gum disease (*BJOG* 2010; doi:10.1111/j.1471-0528.2010.02713.x). An American study of 322 pregnant women with gum disease reports that only 8% of those treated successfully for gum disease had a pre-term baby compared with the 63% of those whose gum treatment failed, a difference that was highly statistically significant. The study also showed that women can safely undergo periodontal treatment during pregnancy.

A cohort of children born to women caught up in the five month long Dutch famine during the second world war seems to have accelerated cognitive ageing in later life compared with a cohort of children born to healthy women during the same period. The key trimesters for exposure were the first and second. The cognitive function most affected was "selective attention," which predicts early Alzheimer's disease. Other cognitive functions such as general intelligence and memory were unaffected (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2010; doi:10.1073/pnas.1009459107).

Massage, humour therapy, and relaxation therapy failed to help children and their parents cope better with stem cell transplantation. The study assessed these interventions at four different treatment sites in the United States. Primary outcome measures were somatic distress and mood disturbance, while secondary measures included time in hospital, time to engraftment, and use of opiate and antiemetic medication (*Cancer* 2010;116:3924-33, doi:10.1002/cncr.25415).



This 28 year old man presented with bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome. He was sent to an independent treatment centre and underwent bilateral carpal tunnel surgical decompression without further investigation. Note the typical acromegalic facial features and the size of his hands. After referral to endocrinology and neurosurgery he underwent curative trans-sphenoidal adenectomy for a growth hormone producing pituitary adenoma. His neuropathic symptoms had been caused by growth hormone related swelling of the median nerve, which usually resolves spontaneously after successful treatment. Bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome is unusual in young men and underlying causes should be considered.

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Surgery is losing its popular position in the Western world among those training to be doctors. In a Greek study, almost two thirds of students indicated their preference for non-surgical specialties. Considerations regarding quality of life and contact with patients had the most effect on choice. The main reasons given by those who wanted to pursue a surgical career were their experiences in the theatre, clinical experience, and patient care. Curriculum designers take note (*Surgery* 2010;148:510-5, doi:10.1016/j.surg.2010.01.013).

In 2007 the UK's Department of Health issued a medical dress code that was translated by many NHS hospitals into an edict that doctors should be "bare below the elbow." Otolaryngologists in Bath say there's no evidence linking these measures with transmission of infection, and that patients are less than convinced. Their questionnaire showed photographs of a doctor in scrubs, formal

attire, and bare below the elbow. Bare below the elbow was voted the least hygienic and the least professional. It also made identifying the person as a doctor hard (*Journal of Laryngology and Otology* 2010;124:963-6, doi:10.1017/S0022215110001167).

Wind instrument players are more at risk than other musicians of lung diseases, hypersensitivity pneumonitis among them. This condition decreases lung function, making it impossible to continue playing, and the treatment is contact avoidance, so one assumes that players apply the treatment without knowing. Infections also reign, with two reported cases of hypersensitivity pneumonitis due to instruments being contaminated by bacteria and moulds (*Chest* 2010;138:467-8, doi:10.1378/chest.10-0868). The musicians had specific serum antibodies against the organisms identified in their instruments. Minerva wonders if medical wind players are any better at cleaning their instruments than non-medics.

A 10 year follow-up of the Medicine, Angioplasty, or Surgical Study (MASS II) reports that compared with bypass grafting, medical treatment was associated with a significantly higher incidence of subsequent myocardial infarction, the need for additional revascularisation, a higher incidence of cardiac death, and an increased risk of combined events. Percutaneous interventions also showed all three of these differences compared with bypass grafting, apart from increased risk of death. Bypass grafting was better than medical treatment at eliminating anginal symptoms (*Circulation* 2010;122:949-57, doi:10.1161/circulationaha.109.911669).

Adoption of a third stage protocol in which the placenta was delivered in a squatting position within five minutes of giving birth resulted in a postpartum haemorrhage rate of less than 1% among 350 consecutive vaginal births. Ideal active management resulted in 5% postpartum haemorrhage, 1% bleeds of more than 1000 ml, and 1% blood transfusion rates. Active management gets the placenta out quickly, but increases the need for manual extraction because bits of placenta are often left inside. Further work is needed to determine whether directing women to squat four minutes after giving birth and push out the placenta results in better outcomes than active or expectant management (*MIDIRS Midwifery Digest* 2010;20:348-51).

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