

# MINERVA

Elderly drivers are often thought to be at risk when their eyesight and physical health start to fail, but it's the speed of their cognitive processing abilities that is the critical test of their need to stop driving. The three other significant risk factors identified by a study in *The Gerontologist* are older age, poorer balance, and poor instrumental functioning performance (2009;48:802-10, <http://gerontologist.gerontologyjournals.org/cgi/content/full/48/6/802>).

A spray-as-you-go airway topical anaesthetic applied by fiberoptic bronchoscope was put to the test in sedated patients with difficult airways during awake intubation. The study compared the safety and efficacy of 2% and 4% lidocaine, and showed excellent or acceptable intubating conditions for all participants. Patients who received 2% lidocaine needed a smaller dosage and had lower plasma concentrations of the drug than those who received 4%, suggesting that the lower concentration might be safer (*Anesthesia and Analgesia* 2009;108:536-43, doi:10.1213/ane.0b013e31818f1665).

Men seem to have an advantage over women when it comes to curbing excessive hunger pangs. After fasting, 23 hungry non-obese adults were exposed to their favourite food, either with or without instructions to suppress their thoughts about eating. Self reported desire to eat and hunger increased to a similar extent in both sexes, as did whole brain metabolism as shown by positron emission tomography. Deliberate cognitive inhibition of the desire for food reduced reports of hunger in both sexes, but only the men showed decreased activity in regions of the brain activated by food stimuli (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2009; early edition, doi:10.1073/pnas.0807423106).

Patients with long QT syndrome can present with syncope or seizures and be erroneously prescribed anti-epileptic drugs. The gene *KCNH2*, which is responsible for type 2 long QT syndrome, encodes a potassium channel active in the hippocampus. A study reviewing genetic and clinical data for nearly 350 consecutive unrelated patients with long QT syndrome found that a seizure phenotype was recorded in 29%, and was more common in patients with type 2 syndrome than in those with type 1 or 3 (*Neurology* 2009;72:224-31, doi:10.1212/01.wnl.0000335760.02995.ca). This association



A 23 year old, right handed African man presented to the accident and emergency department with radial sided wrist pain and stiffness of his right thumb, with no history of trauma. De Quervain's tenosynovitis was diagnosed and the patient was given a peritendinous injection of corticosteroid. Four weeks later his tenosynovitis had completely resolved, but he presented with an unusual pattern of depigmentation over the anatomical snuff box, which extended proximally in a linear fashion towards the cubital fossa. He re-presented seven months after the onset of the hypopigmentation with complete resolution.

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suggests that in type 2 syndrome, disturbances in the potassium channel encoded by *KCNH2* might confer susceptibility for recurrent seizures.

To avoid starting war over the telephone during night time on-call exchanges, a radiology resident in Canada advocates avoiding hostility and "walling off" before you've heard the whole story; request clarification if you remain sceptical; avoid sending nasty emails that will just serve to escalate the dispute; and remember you can report harassment or intimidation. His single

best tip is to remember that the person has not woken you up out of spite—they're worried and need help (*Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2009;180:252, doi:10.1503/cmaj.081974).

An increasing number of baby milk formulas contain long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids to mimic the composition of breast milk. Fatty acid concentration in breast milk varies with maternal diet and is affected by the intake of fish or fish oil supplements. Early boosting with long chain fatty acids has been shown to affect development of central nervous system functions. But maternal fish oil supplementation during lactation might have a downside—a study in the *Journal of Nutrition* reports a significant adverse effect on long term blood pressure, energy intake, and physical activity in 7 year old boys (2009;139:298-304, doi:10.3945/jn.108.095745).

Male pattern baldness appears less often in works of art than in real life. An exception is seen in the depiction of saints, in whom baldness may convey a sense of holiness, similar to the tonsured pates of monks. Hair loss is also associated with depression, and van Gogh paints severe baldness as a feature of the depressive condition that he was trying to depict in *On the Threshold of Eternity* (1890), also known as *Old Man in Sorrow*, shortly before he committed suicide (*JRSM* 2009;102:32-33, doi:10.1258/jrsm.2008.08k023).

A diet rich in total fat and saturated fat, and low in carbohydrate, is associated with worse glycaemic control as measured by glycated haemoglobin in people with type 1 diabetes during intensive treatment. The data remained significant after adjustment for exercise, serum triglycerides, and body mass index (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2009;89:518-24, doi:10.3945/ajcn.2008.26498).

Patients referred to pain clinics after failure of treatment may have changes in their cerebral grey matter indicating a loss in pain processing structures (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2009;71:49-56, doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e31818d1e02). Magnetic resonance imaging was used to compare 14 healthy women with 14 women with chronic pain. Those in the pain group were found to have significant loss of grey matter in the prefrontal, cingulate, and insular cortices. These observations suggest a pathophysiological mechanism.

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