

A study investigated whether individual clinical and psychological risk factors for coronary artery disease correlated with coronary atherosclerosis, as assessed by coronary artery calcium (CAC). In three cohorts of healthy, asymptomatic, and symptomatic people no association was seen between these factors and CAC scores, except for a small negative correlation with depression in symptomatic patients. The findings cast doubt on the use of CAC as a surrogate marker in assessing the clinical importance of risk factors (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2011;73:7-15, doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e3181fd94f5).

A Danish team has tried to distinguish whether de novo mutations in paternal germ cells are responsible for the increased risk of schizophrenia with greater paternal age, or whether late fatherhood produces a predisposition to schizophrenia in children. Its analysis found that the father's age when his first child is born seems to have a greater influence on the risk of schizophrenia than the father's age at conception of later children who are affected. This observation supports the delayed fatherhood rather than the de novo mutation hypothesis (*American Journal of Psychiatry* 2011;168:82-8).

Walking for 40 minutes three times a week increases brain volume and memory (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2011, doi:10.1073/pnas.1015950108). A randomised study reports that the 60 healthy older adults who participated in aerobic training for a year increased their hippocampal volume by 2%, whereas the control group had a 1.4% loss of volume, consistent with normal ageing. The 2% increase reversed the usual age related loss in volume by one to two years, and it led to improvements in spatial memory. Aerobic exercise may boost levels of brain derived neurotrophic factor.

One of the key events in chronic fatigue syndrome is thought to be activation of chronic nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-κB). This step initially leads to a pro-inflammatory immune response, and later on a vitamin D dependent anti-inflammatory response occurs. But this late stage counterbalance to inflammation only works when stores of calcium and vitamin D are abundant. If stores are low, it's possible that the activation of NF-κB persists unchecked, and chronic inflammation and fatigue result (*Medical Hypotheses* 2011;76:208-13, doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2010.09.032).



A 33 year old man who took 1 g daily of penicillamine, a copper chelator, for Wilson's disease noticed a change in the appearance of his neck; the skin puckered when he turned his head around. Histology confirmed elastolysis, and we diagnosed penicillamine induced cutis laxa. Although drug induced cutis laxa is typically benign, it is important to recognise because of the risk of rare, life threatening pulmonary and cardiovascular complications (such as emphysema, bronchiectasis, aortic aneurysms, dissection, and valvular incompetence). Reducing the dose or stopping the drug entirely may improve skin signs and reduce the risk of complications.

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Patient consent obtained.

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An assortment of illicit weight reducing agents has been found in over-the-counter slimming products ingested by poisoned patients. An analysis of slimming products involved in 66 cases of poisoning between 2004 and 2009 revealed 81 products that contained undeclared prescription weight loss drugs, drug analogues, banned drugs, drugs used for an inappropriate indication, or animal thyroid tissue. Some products contained up to six illicit agents, all of which had the potential to cause substantial toxic effects and even death (*British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* 2011;71:250-3, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2125.2010.03822.x).

A review of ancient Greek philosophical and medical texts notes that earlier primitive beliefs attributed great significance to the heart and accounted for cannibalistic behaviours such as possessing and eating the defeated enemy's heart. Mental functions such as thinking and feeling had been attributed to the heart since the times of Greek mythology. The brain's role was underestimated—probably because it was “silent” compared with the beating heart—even after Galen discovered the course of cranial and spinal nerves (*Acta Cardiologica* 2010;65:619-26).

Neither smoking history nor smoking status were significant contributing factors to a model of prediction of breathlessness at a population

level (*BMC Public Health* 2011;11:33, doi:10.1186/1471-2458-11-33). Minerva was surprised to learn that some of the significant predictive factors were marital status (single), sex (female), and social disadvantage.

The clinical usefulness of venesection to lower iron levels was tested in an Italian study of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. After adjusting for changes in body mass index, venesection was significantly associated with normalisation of insulin resistance and liver enzymes in patients without haemochromatosis. These observations were independent of the severity of the liver histology and the weight loss effect of nutritional counselling (*QJM* 2011;104:141-9, doi:10.1093/qjmed/hcq170).

Having a low body mass index (BMI) puts women at risk of delivering an infant too small for gestational age, according to a study in Vietnam, and the risk rose if the total gestational weight gain was less than 10 kg. The optimal weight gain in women with a low BMI was 18.8 kg. The researchers suggest their findings may extend to southeast Asia generally, although a limitation of their study was that pre-pregnancy weights were self reported and measured almost a year before they interviewed the women (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2011;89:127-36).

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