



Gradually worsening shortness of breath
Try the picture quiz in
ENDGAMES, p 321

Do lights at pedestrian crossings give older people enough time to cross safely? After measuring the walking speed of patients attending a geriatric assessment centre, investigators calculated that with current timings many 80 year olds would be unable to make it across a road more than 22 metres wide. Although matching crossing times to the walking speeds of older people may seem unrealistic, in the European Union nearly 40% of pedestrians killed are aged 65 and older (*Age and Ageing* 2010;39:80-6, doi:10.1093/ageing/afp206).

Neurodevelopmental impairment is common in children with severe congenital heart disease. It tends to be blamed on inadequate cerebral perfusion and brain anoxia that occurred intraoperatively while the cardiac defects were being repaired. Magnetic resonance imaging and spectroscopy, which can be used to measure brain growth in fetal life, suggest that the problem starts much earlier. A North American study found that third trimester fetuses with some forms of congenital heart disease had smaller brain volumes than normal fetuses with evidence of impaired neuroaxonal development and metabolism (*Circulation* 2010;121:26-33, doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.109.865568).

People who are obese or overweight are more likely to suffer from low back pain, particularly if they are women, according to a meta-analysis in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* (2010; 171:135-54; doi:10.1093/aje/kwp356). But the odds ratios are only just above unity and most of the studies are cross sectional, so it's far from certain that the association is causal. There are many good reasons to encourage patients to lose weight but Minerva is doubtful that reducing the risk of low back pain is one of them.

A 64 year old man holidaying on an island near Stockholm was bitten on his leg by a tick. He had no local reaction or febrile illness at the time, but over the next few months he developed worsening oedema and proteinuria. Renal biopsy showed membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis and immunoblotting was positive for *Borrelia burgdorferi* IgG antibody. Infection with this spirochaete is well described as a cause of glomerulonephritis in animals, particularly dogs, but it's a rare complication in people (*NDT Plus* 2010;3:105-6, doi:10.1093/ndtplus/sfp160).



A 14 year old boy presented with an asymptomatic bruise-like lesion on his left thigh. Examination revealed a solitary reticular area of pigimentary abnormality consistent with erythema ab igne. The patient strongly denied any regular exposure to heat in that area, but he admitted to frequently working with his laptop computer resting on his left thigh. A skin biopsy to rule out any underlying vascular abnormality showed non-specific changes.

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Patient consent obtained.

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A systematic review identified six randomised controlled trials of lavage of the knee joint in people with symptomatic osteoarthritis. When assessed for pain and function at three months, people who received either lavage or a combination of lavage and intra-articular steroid injection scored no better than those treated with placebo. No analysis of harms was available, but since these procedures aren't beneficial and are considerably more expensive than medical treatment, it's surely time to stop using them (*Rheumatology* 2010 49:334-40; doi:10.1093/rheumatology/kep382).

Early life environment is an important determinant of asthma and atopy, and the findings of a European survey suggest that it's a powerful

influence on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease too. Childhood asthma, severe respiratory infections before age five, and maternal smoking were among the disadvantage factors associated with reduced adult forced expiratory volume. Childhood disadvantage was as common in the population as current smoking, and had an equally large effect on lung function and risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (*Thorax* 2010;65:14-20, doi:10.1136/thx.2008.112136).

A study from the United States used longitudinal data to explore the consequences of being bullied as an adolescent, but ran into trouble over definitions. When asked with a single direct question only 28% of students in the sample admitted that they had been bullied. However, further inquiries about being on the receiving end of threats, attacks, ridicule, lies, or jokes raised the estimate to 82%. Those identified as victims of bullying at the start of the study tended to display lower self esteem and self efficacy when followed up a year later (*Youth Society* 2009;41:209, doi:10.1177/0044118X09351067).

A scoring system to predict early risk of recurrence after ischaemic stroke has been developed from data collected for nearly 1500 consecutive stroke patients. Known as the recurrence risk estimator at 90 days, or RRE-90 score, it requires only information likely to be available to hospital doctors in North America and Europe. Predictors of recurrence included stroke subtype at admission, previous history of transient ischaemic attack or stroke, and site, age, and distribution of brain infarcts. The tool is available at www.nmr.mgh.harvard.edu/RRE-90 (*Neurology* 2010;74:128-35, doi:10.1212/WNL.0b013e3181ca9cff).

A large cross sectional survey of Japanese people with diabetes found a prevalence of around 12% for truncal pruritis—about four times higher than that in non-diabetic controls. People with pruritis also tended to report sensory symptoms in the feet and to have absent ankle jerks. More detailed investigation of a subsample found an association between pruritis and an impaired blood pressure response to change in posture. The investigators conclude that truncal pruritis is probably a symptom of diabetic peripheral neuropathy affecting small diameter nerve fibres (*Diabetes Care* 2010;33:150-5, doi:10.2337/dc09-0632).

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