Peer pressure affects most of us, but who knew it extended to our memories? Thirty participants watched a documentary video and then took a memory test. When led to believe that peers had provided certain answers, participants showed a strong tendency to conform in 68.3% of trials, even if their initial recollection had been accurate. With the trick debunked, some reverted to correct memories, but a substantial number of memory errors persisted. The researchers attribute their finding to activity in the amygdala and say it could explain conformist behaviour in cults and sects (Science 2011;333:108-11, doi:10.1126/science.1203557).

A review of opioid use in cancer conducted to update recommendations from the European Association of Palliative Care shows how few clinical choices in this area are based on strong evidence (http://pmj.sagepub.com/content/current). No randomised trials have examined the best management of opioid induced nausea and vomiting, a side effect likely to affect quality of life for many patients. Recommendations for dose titration of oral opioids depend on data from only 36 patients in one trial. The relatively recent practice of switching opioids to improve analgesia or reduce side effects is not supported by a single randomised controlled trial.

Eating disorders are rife among athletes, according to a presenter at the International Congress of the Royal College of Psychiatrists last month. The psychiatrist and former athlete said that anorexia and bulimia are common among athletes, whose attention to diet and weight put them at high risk. Spotting the problem can be more difficult in athletes because they tend to be lean. Athletes can easily obtain attention if they sustain physical injuries, but also need easy access to mental health services.

Could cooking and storing milk in stainless steel containers be causing India’s epidemic of type 2 diabetes? (Medical Hypotheses 2011;77:84-6, doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2011.03.012). High levels of easily absorbable chelated chromium, derived from stainless steel, have been found in curd and buttermilk stored in these vessels. Preconception exposure to chromium in mice has been shown to cause high glucose in their offspring, indicating a possible epigenetic or transgenerational mechanism. The authors propose that preconception or fetal exposure to high levels of chromium may cause insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes from birth.

A case of head injury

A 71 year old man presented with a five year history of what he described as an eyelash that recurrently grew too long and had hard deposits on it. Excision biopsy showed no dysplasia or malignancy but did show chronic lymphocyte infiltration, and demodecites were identified. The microscopic mite anchors to hair follicles or within sebaceous glands and is associated with a range of eye diseases, from slight irritation to dandruff-like deposits and more severe scarring. This patient had a lymphocytic reaction to the parasite, resulting in the atypical eyelash. The problem has not yet recurred.

There’s a significant dose-response relation between alcohol and pregnancy outcomes (BJOG 2011, doi:10.1111/j.1471-0528.2011.03050.x). Heavy drinking during pregnancy increases the risk of low birth weight, preterm births, and small for gestational age babies. Light to moderate alcohol consumption shows no effect. The researchers say that between one and 1.5 alcoholic drinks per day is the cut-off for adverse effects. Of course, it all comes down to individual differences in alcohol metabolism, and Minerva for one will not be encouraging pregnant women to drink more on the basis of this review.

Lung transplant patients have substantially worse outcomes if they have a history of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD). Patients with pre-transplantation GORD had 25% mortality at six months, compared with 10% for patients without. Lung function, measured by forced expiratory volume in one second, was also poorer in patients with GORD. No effect was observed on rates of early transplant rejection. The mechanism causing poorer outcomes in patients with GORD is unclear, but the researchers suggest aggressive treatment after transplantation could improve results (Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery 2011;142:47-523, doi:10.1016/j.jtcvs.2011.04.028).

There was no difference in outcomes between patients with and without HELLP syndrome (Hypertension, Eclampsia, Low platelet count, Liver enzymes, and Preeclampsia; 2011;343:d4690). The authors from the Barts Health NHS Trust in London showed that there was no difference in maternal mortality or serious adverse events between patients with HELLP and those who did not have HELLP.

An international panel of vasculitis experts have been asked to develop new disease terminology, with the goal of shifting from honorific eponyms to descriptive or aetiology based nomenclature. This remit was triggered by evidence that Dr Friedrich Wegener was a member of the Nazi Party before and during the second world war. The experts also note that Wegener was not the first person to describe the disease. The new term will henceforth be “granulomatosis with polyangiitis (Wegener’s)” or GPA. The parenthetical term will be adopted for several years to avoid confusion (Arthritis and Rheumatism 2011;63:863-4, doi:10.1002/art.30286).

Patients with Barrett’s oesophagus have a higher risk of developing esophageal adenocarcinoma than the general population, so they are at increased risk of esophageal cancer. In the Randomized Open-Label Study of Esomeprazole for Barrett’s Oesophagus (ROAD) trial, patients were randomised to receive either esomeprazole 20 mg or placebo in a double-blind, placebo-controlled study for one year (Lancet 2011;378:287-94, doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61147-8). The aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of esomeprazole in reducing the risk of progression to high grade dysplasia or cancer in Barrett’s oesophagus. The study shows that esomeprazole 20 mg for one year is effective, well tolerated and reduces the risk of progression compared with placebo (Cite this as: BMJ 2011;343:d4711).