Singing is believed to help patients with non fluent aphasia regain speech after having a stroke, but the rhythm might be more important than the tune. A pilot study of 17 patients assessed the roles of melody and rhythm for promoting speech production, and its results suggest that rhythm is more important, especially for those with basal ganglia lesions. The researchers controlled for variability in vocal frequency, pitch accuracy, rhythm, syllable duration, phonetic complexity, and learning effects (Brain 2011;134:3083-93, doi:10.1093/brain/awr240).

Parents are more likely to prefer aggressive treatment for their child with incurable cancer (54.5%), compared with the choices proposed by healthcare professionals (15.6%, p<0.001). Compared with the professionals, parents rank hope as a more important factor in decision making about treatment and palliative care. Understanding these differences in priorities may improve communication and end of life care for terminally ill children (CMAJ 2011;183:17, doi:10.1503/cmaj.110392).

Being discharged from an intensive care unit to a general ward before a tracheostomy has been removed does not carry a survival disadvantage (Critical Care Medicine 2011;39:2240-5, doi:10.1097/CCM.0b013e3182227533). A study in the United States undertook multivariate analyses for ward mortality using data from more than 4000 patients, just under half of whom had needed mechanical ventilation, with 13% requiring tracheotomy. The researchers found that crude ward mortality was similar in patients who were decannulated and in those who were still cannulated.

It’s not clear whether tamoxifen causes congenital abnormalities. Data gathered from PubMed and from AstraZeneca—the company that makes tamoxifen—show a mixed bag of results with lots of possible confounders. Despite this, Belgian oncologists conclude that the relatively high frequency of severe congenital abnormalities demands that reliable birth control be used during tamoxifen treatment for breast cancer and that a washout period of two months be used during tamoxifen treatment for breast cancer and that a washout period of two months be advised before conception is attempted, based on the known half life of tamoxifen (Oncologist 2011;16:1547-51, doi:10.1634/theoncologist.2011-0121).

In a trial that looked at people’s breakfast choices, halving the salt content of bread did not reduce bread consumption, nor did participants choose a salty sandwich filling to compensate (Journal of Nutrition 2011;141:2249-55, doi:10.3945/ jn.111.141366). In this four week study, the 116 participants were allocated to receive either conventional brown bread, bread in which the salt content was gradually reduced over time, or conventional brown bread, bread in which the salt content was gradually reduced over time, or conventional brown bread, bread in which the salt content was gradually reduced over time, or reduced salt bread in which additives were used to enhance saltiness. Although halving salt content had no effect on the amount of bread consumed or the choice of sandwich fillings, reducing it by two thirds did.

A biomechanical study of rotator cuff tears using human cadavers found that a tear of the entire supraspinatus tendon is the crucial stage for producing an increased rotational range of shoulder motion but a decreased capacity to abduct. If the tear progresses to the infraspinatus muscle, the humeral head becomes critically impacted, but this can be stabilised by the pectoralis major and latissimus dorsi muscles. The experimenters say the early detection of tears is crucial for preventing adverse consequences (Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery 2011;93:2100-9, doi:10.2106/JBJS.00032).

Vascular endothelial growth factor seems to be a key regulator of successful embryo implantation. Over 30 cytokines were identified in human uterine fluid taken from fertile women during the mid-proliferative (non-receptive) and mid-secretory (receptive) phases of the menstrual cycle and from women with unexplained infertility during the mid-secretory phase. Vascular endothelial growth factor was significantly reduced in the mid-secretory phase of infertile women, compared with fertile women, and was shown to be responsible for blastocyst outgrowth (Endocrinology 2011;152:4948-56, doi:10.1210/en.2011-1248).

Women undergoing abdominal hysterectomy under regional anaesthesia enjoy a better quality of recovery than those who undergo a general anaesthetic. Postoperative quality of recovery scores were significantly higher and opioid consumption and pain scores were significantly lower in the regional than in the general anaesthesia group. Patients should be offered a choice and decisions should not automatically be made by anaesthetists, say the authors of this prospective randomised controlled trial (Anesth Analg 2011;113:1480-6, doi:10.1213/ANE.0b013e3182334d8b).

Is working long hours good for you? Apparently not, if you’re a woman. According to follow-up data at five years from the Whitehall II study of British civil servants (Psychological Medicine 2011;41:2485-94, doi:10.1017/ S0033291711000171), women who worked more than 55 hours per week had more depression and anxiety than those working 35-40 hours per week. Cite this as: BMJ 2011;343:d7880.