

News News News

from The Journal of Chinese Medicine

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NEWS from *The Journal of Chinese Medicine* summarises recent research in acupuncture and Chinese medicine, as well as diet, lifestyle, exercise, relaxation and meditation and other miscellaneous subjects. Much of this information will help practitioners to accurately inform patients of the benefits or risks of lifestyle choices and give informed answers to patients' questions, aid in the practice of preventive medicine and help practitioners take care of their own health.

Acupuncture/pressure for morning sickness

A meta-analysis has examined the effects of various methods for stimulating acupuncture points (acustimulation, AS) for the prevention of nausea and vomiting in pregnant women (NVP). The authors identified 14 eligible trials published over the last 16 years, involving a total of 1615 women and using either acupressure, acupuncture or electrical stimulation (ETS) as a method of AS. After the treatment, compared with controls, AS (all methods) reduced the proportion of nausea by more than 50% and vomiting by around 40%. Acupressure applied by finger pressure or wristband reduced NVP, as did ETS. However, acupuncture did not show an effect on reducing NVP. The authors advise caution in interpreting the results, as the number of acupuncture trials included was limited. (Meta-analysis of acustimulation effects on nausea and vomiting in pregnant women. *Explore (NY)*. 2006 Sep-Oct;2(5):412-21).

Acupuncture for labour induction

Fifty-six primigravid women at 39 weeks or greater with a singleton gestation and Bishop score (a system for predicting whether induction of labour will be required) of less than seven were randomised to usual medical care or usual care plus three acupuncture

treatments. Each treatment consisted of eight needles applied bilaterally to Hegu L.I.-4, Sanyinjiao SP-6, Shangliao BL-31 and Ciliao BL-32. Mean time from randomisation to delivery occurred 21 hours sooner in the acupuncture group, but this difference did not reach statistical significance. Compared with controls, women in the acupuncture group tended to be more likely to labour spontaneously and less likely to deliver by Caesarean section. (A randomized controlled trial of acupuncture for initiation of labor in nulliparous women. *J Matern Fetal Neonatal Med*. 2006 Aug;19(8):465-70).

Acupuncture facilitates natural birth

Acupuncture significantly reduces duration of labour and reduces the need for augmentation of labour with contraction-stimulating drugs. A study randomised 100 women with spontaneous rupture of membranes at term to either acupuncture or no acupuncture. Treatment was individualised on the basis of traditional Chinese medical diagnosis and used three points per patient from a pool of nine possible choices. Treatment principles applied were to increase energy, soften the cervix and open the Conception vessel. Although time from membrane rupture to delivery did not differ significantly between the groups, length of active labour was significantly reduced in the acupuncture group by a mean difference

of 1.7 hours. In addition, significantly fewer patients in the acupuncture group required oxytocin (used to stimulate contractions) for longer than two hours. Medical induction of labour was eventually necessary in 15 acupuncture patients and 20 controls. When induction was carried out, women assigned to acupuncture completed the active phase of labour in half the time compared to controls, a statistically significant difference. (Acupuncture administered after spontaneous rupture of membranes at term significantly reduces the length of birth and use of oxytocin. A randomized controlled trial. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand*. 2006;85(11):1348-53).

Electro-acupuncture effective for labour pain

In a study investigating the efficacy of electro-acupuncture (EA) for relief of labour pain, 36 pregnant women were randomly divided into an EA group and a control group. Two rounds of EA were carried out, one at the beginning of the active phase of labour and one at 7-8cm of cervical dilatation. Hegu L.I.-4 and Sanyinjiao SP-6 were stimulated bilaterally for 20 minutes at a frequency of 2-100 Hz and current of 14-30 mA (a tolerable level) with a dense/disperse waveform. The EA group was found to exhibit lower pain intensity and better relaxation during labour than the control group. In addition, there was found to be

a significant increase in the concentration of the pain-relieving substances beta-endorphin and 5-hydroxytryptamine in the peripheral blood of the acupuncture group at the end of the first stage of labour. (Electro-acupuncture in relieving labor pain. *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.* 2007 Mar;4(1):125-30).

Acumoxa for breech babies

A study has evaluated the effects of acupuncture and moxibustion on the behaviour of breech fetuses. Women were treated by stimulating Zhiyin BL-67 twice a week for 20 minutes. Fourteen cases were treated using both acupuncture and moxibustion, 15 cases by moxibustion and ten cases by acupuncture. In 56% of cases, foetal position converted from breech to cephalic (80% success rate for moxibustion, 28% for acupuncture, 57% for acupuncture plus moxibustion). Conversion, on average, was achieved after three sessions. During the process of stimulation, it was found that foetal movements were reduced by both acupuncture plus moxibustion and moxibustion alone, and that foetal heart rate was reduced only by acupuncture plus moxibustion in combination. (Effects of three different stimulations (acupuncture, moxibustion, acupuncture plus moxibustion) of BL.67 acupoint at small toe on fetal behavior of breech presentation. *Am J Chin Med.* 2007;35(1):27-33).

Acupuncture 'as good as HRT' after oophorectomy

Acupuncture results in a significant improvement in perimenopausal symptoms in women who have had their ovaries surgically removed (oophorectomy). Sixty-seven women who had undergone oophorectomy were non-randomly divided into two groups. One group was given acupuncture and the comparison group was given usual medical care (HRT drug Livial - a combination of synthetic oestrogen, progesterone and androgen). Kupperman index score (a scale for measuring the severity of menopausal complaints) and

levels of serum beta-endorphin were found to differ significantly between the acupuncture and the Livial group. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that acupuncture performs as well as or better than Livial, but cautioned that bias and small sample size may have influenced the results. (Acupuncture for perimenopausal symptoms in women who underwent oophorectomy a comparative study. *Forsch Komplementarmed.* 2007 Feb;14(1):25-32).

Acupuncture reduces hot flush severity

Acupuncture is associated with a significant decrease in the severity, but not the frequency, of postmenopausal hot flushes. In a randomised, placebo-controlled pilot study, 29 postmenopausal women averaging at least seven moderate to severe hot flushes per 24 hours, were randomised to receive seven weeks (nine treatment sessions) of either active acupuncture (standardised, individually-tailored point prescriptions) or placebo acupuncture (non-penetrating placebo needles at sham acupuncture points). Those receiving active treatment had a significantly greater reduction in hot flush severity than those receiving placebo. There was no significant difference in the reduction of hot flush frequency between the active and placebo groups, however both groups experienced significantly fewer episodes of flushing. (Acupuncture for postmenopausal hot flushes. *Maturitas.* 2007 Apr 20;56(4):383-95).

Medical acupuncture ineffective for hot flushes

A study has found that medical acupuncture was no more effective than sham acupuncture for reducing menopausal hot flushes. A total of 103 participants were randomised to medical or sham acupuncture. Participants received biweekly treatments for five weeks after a baseline assessment week. They were then followed for an additional seven weeks. At week six, the percentage of residual hot flushes was 60% in the medical acupuncture group and 62% in the sham group. At week 12,

the percentage of residual hot flushes was 73% in the medical acupuncture group and 55% in the sham group. (Acupuncture for hot flashes: a randomized, sham-controlled clinical study. *Menopause.* 2007 Jan-Feb;14(1):45-52).

Acupuncture cost-effective for period pain

A pragmatic randomised study has evaluated the clinical and economic effectiveness of acupuncture in the treatment of women with dysmenorrhoea. 201 patients were allocated to receive either up to 15 acupuncture sessions over three months or no acupuncture. Both groups additionally received usual medical care. Outcome measures of pain intensity and quality of life were recorded at baseline and after three months. After three months, patients in the acupuncture group were found to have less pain than controls. A cost-effectiveness calculation was performed, based on calculating quality-adjusted life years (QALYs). This analysis showed that although acupuncture treatment incurred additional costs when compared with usual care, the improvement to patient's quality of life means it can be regarded as cost-effective when compared with international benchmarks. (Pragmatic randomised study evaluating clinical and economic effectiveness of acupuncture treatment in patients with dysmenorrhoea. *Focus Altern Complement Ther.* 2006;11(S):53).

Acupuncture has positive effect on IVF

A randomised prospective controlled clinical study examined the effect of luteal-phase acupuncture on the outcome of in vitro fertilisation/intracytoplasmic sperm injection. 116 patients receiving acupuncture according to the principles of traditional Chinese medicine were compared with a group of 109 receiving placebo acupuncture. In both groups, acupuncture was carried out immediately after embryo transfer. The TCM acupuncture group received needling at Guanyuan REN-4, Qihai REN-6, Guilai ST-29, Neiguan P-6, Diji SP-8 and Xuehai SP-10 with ear seeds placed at auricular

points Shenmen, Zigong, Neifenmi and Pizhixia (left in place for two days and pressed twice daily for 10 minutes). The placebo group received acupuncture designed not to influence fertility (Sidu SJ-9, Xiaoluo SJ-12, Fengshi GB-31, Zhongdu GB-32, Yanglingquan GB-34; ear seeds at Shangzhi, Fengsi, Shisheng, Jian). Three days after embryo transfer, all patients received a second acupuncture treatment. For the placebo group, needling was the same as previously, while the TCM acupuncture group were needled at Hegu L.I.-4, Sanyinjiao SP-6, Zusanli ST-36, Taixi KID-3 and Taichong LIV-3. Both groups had ear seeds placed on the other ear at the same points as previously (again pressed twice daily for two days). Clinical pregnancy rate and ongoing pregnancy rate (33.6% and 28.4% in the TCM acupuncture group were significantly higher than in the placebo acupuncture group (15.6% and 13.8%). (Effect of acupuncture on the outcome of in vitro fertilization and intracytoplasmic sperm injection: a randomized, prospective, controlled clinical study. *Fertil Steril.* 2006 May;85(5):1347-51).

Acupuncture for chronic prostatitis

A pilot study has assessed the use of body and auricular acupuncture in men suffering from chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain syndrome (CP/CPPS). Ten men who were refractory to conventional therapies were given 30 minutes of body and auricular acupuncture twice weekly for six weeks. A standardised set of acupuncture points, based on traditional Chinese medicine principles, was used. The body points given at each visit included Waiguan SJ-5, Zulinqi GB-41, Taichong LIV-3, Hegu L.I.-4, Dijii SP-8 and Sanyinjiao SP-6. The auricular acupuncture points needled at each visit (alternating ears with each treatment) included Shenmen, Kidney, Liver, Lung and Spleen. Decreases in total prostatitis symptom scores at three and six weeks from baseline were significant and remained so after an additional six weeks of follow-up. Changes in quality of life scores were also significant. (A pilot study on acupuncture for lower

urinary tract symptoms related to chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain. *Chin Med.* 2007 Feb 6;2:1).

Acupuncture for ulcerative colitis

In a prospective, randomised, controlled clinical trial, 29 patients with mild to moderately active ulcerative colitis were randomly assigned to receive either traditional acupuncture and moxibustion, or sham acupuncture consisting of superficial needling at non-acupuncture points. Patients were treated in 10 sessions over a period of five weeks and followed up for 16 weeks. Colitis Activity Index (CAI) decreased in both acupuncture and sham groups and in both cases these changes were associated with significant improvements in general well-being. Differences in efficacy between traditional acupuncture and sham acupuncture were small and significant only for CAI as the main outcome measure. The authors conclude that both traditional and sham acupuncture seem to offer therapeutic benefit in this condition. (Acupuncture and moxibustion in the treatment of ulcerative colitis: a randomized controlled study. *Scand J Gastroenterol.* 2006 Sep;41(9):1056-63).

Acupuncture improves chronic knee pain

A meta-analysis has evaluated the effects of acupuncture on pain and function in patients with chronic knee pain. Combining data from five randomised controlled studies judged to have high validity (1334 patients), acupuncture was found to be superior to sham acupuncture for both pain and function. The differences were still significant at long-term follow-up. (Acupuncture treatment for chronic knee pain: a systematic review. *Rheumatology.* 2007 46(3):384-390)

Auricular acupuncture for acute pain

A randomised controlled pilot study compared the effects of standard emergency medical care to auricular acupuncture plus standard care in patients with acute pain syndromes.

Eighty-seven people with a diagnosis of acute pain completed the emergency room (ER) trial. Participants in the acupuncture group experienced a 23% reduction in pain before leaving the ER, while average pain levels in participants in the standard medical care group remained unchanged. However, both groups experienced a similar reduction in pain 24 hours after treatment in the ER. (Auricular acupuncture in the treatment of acute pain syndromes: A pilot study. *Mil Med.* 2006 Oct;171(10):1010-4).

Auricular acupuncture reduces pain after knee surgery

The authors of this study investigated the need for postoperative pain medication in 120 patients undergoing knee surgery. Participants randomly received true auricular acupuncture (Lung, Shenmen and Knee points) or a sham procedure (three non-acupuncture points on the auricular helix) on the ipsilateral ear before ambulatory knee arthroscopy. Permanent press needles were retained for one day after surgery and post-operative pain was treated with ibuprofen. Pain intensity was similar in both groups at all time points, but those in the acupuncture group required significantly less post-operative ibuprofen than controls. (Auricular acupuncture for pain relief after ambulatory knee surgery: a randomized trial. *CMAJ.* 2007 Jan 16;176(2):179-83)

Auricular electro-acupuncture reduces histamine itch

In a study of 32 healthy volunteers, histamine was applied to both forearms, followed five minutes later by electro-acupuncture to either the left or right ear. The extent of skin reddening on both arms was measured before and after acupuncture. As a control procedure, subjects underwent a second bilateral histamine application and measurement four weeks later, without acupuncture. Acupuncture was found to significantly reduce (and in some instances prevent altogether) the area of itchy redness on the ipsilateral forearm only. (Effect

of acupuncture on experimentally induced itch. *Acta Derm Venereol.* 2006;86(5):399-403).

Acupuncture eases TMJ pain

A double-blind randomised controlled trial followed twenty-seven patients suffering from temporomandibular joint myofascial pain (TMJ/MP) who were assigned to receive either real acupuncture or a sham acupuncture intervention. Real acupuncture was found to have a greater influence than sham acupuncture on clinical outcome measures of TMJ/MP and changes in the majority of measures reached a level of statistical significance. (The efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of temporomandibular joint myofascial pain: a randomised controlled trial. *J Dent.* 2007 Mar;35(3):259-67).

Acupuncture stops gagging

Acupuncture at REN-24 is an effective method of controlling the gag reflex, which can prevent patients from receiving dental treatment. For this study, members of the British Dental Acupuncture Society took part in a patient audit. Patients had two upper dental alginate impressions taken (or attempted), one before and one after acupuncture at Chengqiang REN-24. Prior to acupuncture, none of the 37 patients was able to tolerate the procedure, however after acupuncture there was a mean improvement of 53% in measures of gagging severity at all stages of the impression taking process. 81% of patients were able to accept the impression taking after acupuncture. (The use of acupuncture in controlling the gag reflex in patients requiring an upper alginate impression: an audit. *Br Dent J.* 2006 Dec 9;201(11):721-5).

Acupuncture for anxiety and pain during lithotripsy

A randomised controlled study was carried out to determine whether a combination of auricular and body acupuncture is effective as an adjunctive treatment for preprocedural anxiety and

pain, in 56 patients undergoing lithotripsy (ultrasonic destruction of kidney stones). In the acupuncture group, preprocedural auricular acupuncture was combined with intraprocedural electro-acupuncture stimulation, while in the control group both treatments were sham. Patients in the acupuncture group were less anxious preprocedure than those in the sham group and they also used a significantly smaller amount of analgesic during the procedure than those in the sham control group. Patients in the acupuncture group also reported significantly lower pain scores on admission to the recovery room. (Acupuncture as An Adjunct for Sedation during Lithotripsy. *J Altern Complement Med.* 2007 Mar;13(2):241-246).

Acupuncture reduces anxiety of eye surgery

An Italian study has found that patients undergoing cataract removal are less anxious after receiving acupuncture. Participants underwent phacoemulsification, in which the cloudy eye lens is emulsified with an ultrasound probe, before being aspirated and replaced by an artificial lens. The procedure is carried out under topical anaesthesia while the patient is awake and can therefore provoke significant anxiety. In this prospective randomised double-blind controlled trial, anxiety levels were assessed before and after surgery in three groups (no acupuncture, true acupuncture and sham acupuncture) of 25 patients. Preoperative anxiety levels were significantly lower only in the true acupuncture group. The difference in postoperative anxiety levels between the real acupuncture and no acupuncture groups was also significant. (Sedative effect of acupuncture during cataract surgery: prospective randomized double-blind study. *J Cataract Refract Surg.* 2006 Nov;32(11):1951-4).

Acupuncture & massage after cancer surgery

Providing massage and acupuncture in addition to usual care results in decreased pain and depressive mood among postoperative cancer patients. One hundred and thirty eight cancer patients

undergoing surgery were randomly assigned to receive either massage and acupuncture on postoperative days 1 and 2 in addition to usual care, or a control of usual care alone, and were followed over three days. Patients' pain, nausea, vomiting and mood were assessed at four time points. Participants in the intervention group experienced a decrease of 1.4 points on a 0-10 pain scale, compared to 0.6 in the control group, and a decrease in depressive mood of 0.4 (on a scale of 1-5) compared to no change in the control group. (Symptom management with massage and acupuncture in postoperative cancer patients: a randomized controlled trial. *J Pain Symptom Manage.* 2007 Mar;33(3):258-66).

Acupuncture improves nerve conduction in peripheral neuropathy

A pilot study has evaluated the therapeutic effect of acupuncture on peripheral neuropathy (PN) as measured by changes in nerve conduction and assessment of subjective symptoms. One hundred and ninety-two consecutive patients with PN as diagnosed by nerve conduction studies (NCS) were evaluated over a period of 1 year. Of 47 patients who met the criteria for PN of undefined aetiology, 21 received traditional Chinese acupuncture, while 26 received medical care but no specific treatment for PN. 76% of the acupuncture group improved symptomatically and objectively as measured by NCS, while only 15% of the control group did so. 14% of the acupuncture group showed no change and 10% showed an aggravation, whereas in the control group 27% showed no change and 58% an aggravation. Subjective improvement was fully correlated with improvement in NCS in both groups. (Acupuncture treatment improves nerve conduction in peripheral neuropathy. *Eur J Neurol.* 2007 Mar;14(3):276-81).

Electro-acupuncture reduces post-stroke spasticity

A combination of electro-acupuncture and muscle strengthening exercises

can significantly reduce the spasticity of the wrist joint in stroke survivors. In a crossover trial, seven chronic stroke subjects (average age 63) received two six-week treatment regimens: combined electro-acupuncture and strengthening twice a week, and strengthening twice a week only. Wrist spasticity was reduced significantly in the combined treatment group after the six-week period, but not in the strengthening-only group. (The effect of electro-acupuncture on spasticity of the wrist joint in chronic stroke survivors. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil.* 2007 Feb;88(2):159-66).

Acupuncture balances anxious immune system

Acupuncture has been found to counteract impairment of the immune system associated with anxiety. Thirty-four female patients, 30-60 years old, suffering from anxiety, received ten acupuncture sessions during the course of a year (leading to complete remission in all cases). Sessions lasted 30 min and 19 points were used. Blood samples were taken from all patients before and 72 hours after the first acupuncture treatment and a subset of 12 patients had blood taken immediately after the first session and one month after the end of the whole course of treatment. A variety of immune parameters was measured in each blood sample. Immune functions that were reduced in anxious women (chemotaxis, phagocytosis, lymphoproliferation and natural killer cell activity) were found to be significantly improved by acupuncture, while those that were over active (superoxide anion levels and excessive lymphoproliferation) were lowered significantly. Acupuncture was thus shown to have a modulatory effect on the immune system in this group of patients. (Effect of acupuncture treatment on the immune function impairment found in anxious women. *Am J Chin Med.* 2007;35(1):35-51).

Acupuncture for substance abuse anxiety

An exploratory study evaluated the benefits of adding auricular acupuncture

to a 21-day outpatient structured psychoeducational treatment programme for women with concurrent substance use problems, anxiety and depression. Women receiving acupuncture (n=185) reported having reduced physiological cravings for substances, felt significantly less depressed and anxious, and were better able to reflect on and resolve difficulties than women in the control group (n=101). (Acupuncture Treatment for Women With Concurrent Substance Use and Anxiety/Depression: An Effective Alternative Therapy? *Fam Community Health.* 30(2):112-120, April/June 2007).

Acupressure decreases dementia agitation

A pilot study has suggests that acupressure can decrease the agitated behaviour associated with dementia. Thirty-one subjects with dementia were assigned to a six-week acupressure treatment programme consisting of five minutes treatment, twice a day, five days a week, for four weeks. After a treatment-free period of one week, all the subjects then served as controls, undergoing a four-week protocol consisting of companionship and conversation. Twenty patients completed the trial. Researchers found that acupressure therapy significantly reduced verbal and physical attacks, compared with the control treatment. In addition, acupressure led to an immediate improvement in patient behaviour and appeared to prevent aggressive symptoms from occurring in the first place. (The efficacy of acupressure for decreasing agitated behaviour in dementia: a pilot study. *J Clin Nurs.* 2007 Feb;16(2):308-15).

Acupuncture promising for hypertension care

The effects of acupuncture as an add-on to conventional antihypertensive management methods (medication and/or lifestyle modification) were investigated. A randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial recruited 41 hypertensive or pre-hypertensive volunteers and assigned them to real

or sham acupuncture. All those already receiving hypertensive medication continued to take it. Acupuncture prescriptions were partially individualised (based on Korean Saam acupuncture principles). Measurements of blood pressure (BP), overall health and pain were performed at baseline and again at four and eight weeks. The sham acupuncture group showed no significant change in mean BP, while the real acupuncture group showed a significant decrease in mean BP after eight weeks of intervention (from 136.8/83.7 to 122.1/76.8 mmHg). (Acupuncture, a promising adjunctive therapy for essential hypertension: a double-blind, randomized, controlled trial. *Neurol Res.* 2007;29 Suppl 1:S98-103).

Acupuncture increases nitric oxide synthesis

Acupuncture significantly increases the concentration of nitric oxide (NO, a key biological signalling molecule involved in vasodilation and neurotransmission) in local body tissues. In a randomised, double-blind, crossover study, 20 volunteers underwent one session each of real and non-invasive sham acupuncture in a single hand and forearm, with a one-week interval between treatments. NO concentration in plasma samples from the acupunctured arm was found to be significantly increased 60 minutes after acupuncture. Blood flow to the palm of the acupunctured arm also increased, and this correlated with NO increase. These changes were not observed with non-invasive sham-acupuncture. The authors speculate that these effects might contribute to the pain relief provided by acupuncture. (Acupuncture enhances generation of nitric oxide and increases local circulation. *Anesth Analg.* 2007 Feb;104(2):301-7).

Altered Pain Sensitivity at Disease-Specific Acupuncture Points in PMS

Specific conditions are commonly believed to alter pain sensitivity at particular corresponding acupuncture points (AP), making them more sensitive than surrounding tissue. The aim of this

study was to investigate whether the pressure pain threshold (PPT) of specific AP was associated with the severity of premenstrual syndrome. Forty-six teenage females were divided into high PMS (HP) and low PMS (LP) groups, based on their scores for the Menstruation Distress Questionnaire (MDQ). The PPT at sites in the leg (Sanyinjiao SP-6, Xuanzhong GB-39 and Taichong LIV-3 and a non-AP 2 cm anterior to Sanyinjiao SP-6) and in the arm (Neiguan P-6, Waiguan SJ-5 and Hegu L.I.-4 and a non-AP 2 cm proximal to Neiguan P-6) were measured using an algometer (device for measuring pain caused by pressure). The PPT of the HP group at Sanyinjiao SP-6 was significantly lower than that of the LP group, but not at other AP or at non-AP. (The Alteration of Pain Sensitivity at Disease-Specific Acupuncture Points in Premenstrual Syndrome. *J Physiol Sci.* 2007 Mar 24; [Epub ahead of print]).

Light touch calms nerves

Recent research shows that C-tactile nerve fibres, which respond to light touch, project into the brain's limbic system and are responsible for the feelings of calm and wellbeing elicited by gentle manual stimulation (such as stroking). A review suggests that these findings are relevant to acupuncture. They may explain why even superficial acupuncture with brief needle insertion can have a clinical effect and why non-invasive sham acupuncture may not be a suitable control for clinical trials. (Role of C tactile fibres in touch and emotion - clinical and research relevance to acupuncture. *Acupunct Med.* 2006 Dec;24(4):169-71).

Acupuncture safe, risks negligible

Two prospective surveys conducted among different groups of professionals in the UK, including doctors, physiotherapists and practitioners primarily trained in acupuncture, monitored adverse events to acupuncture over a defined period of time. A total of 652 acupuncturists reported 6733 adverse reactions in 66,229 patients, an adverse event rate of 10.2%. The most common events were

tiredness (3%) bleeding or bruising (3%), aggravation of symptoms (2%) and pain at the needling site (1%). There were no serious adverse events. A total of 86 (0.1%) of the treatments was associated with an event that the practitioner judged to be significant though without persistent consequences for the patient's health. The author concludes that the risks associated with acupuncture can be classified as negligible and that acupuncture is a very safe treatment in the hands of competent practitioners. (The safety of acupuncture - evidence from the UK. *Acupunct Med.* 2006 Dec;24 Suppl:553-57).

Electro-acupuncture cures horses' back pain

A study of electro-acupuncture for chronic low back pain in horses has found that it can successfully alleviate thoracolumbar pain and that the analgesic effect persists for up to two weeks after the treatment. (Evaluation of electroacupuncture treatment of horses with signs of chronic thoracolumbar pain. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2005 Jul 15;227(2):281-6).

Chinese herbs for chemotherapy toxicity

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine (TCHM) does not reduce the toxic effects of chemotherapy on patients' blood cell populations, however it does have a significant impact on control of nausea. One hundred and twenty patients with early-stage breast or colon cancer who required postoperative chemotherapy were enrolled. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either individualised TCHM prescriptions of herbal extract granules or placebo packages containing non-therapeutic herbs that smelled and tasted like a typical herbal tea. TCHM did not reduce chemotherapy toxicity as measured by any haematological parameters. Incidence of nausea was the only non-haematologic toxicity that was significantly reduced in the TCHM group (14.6% versus 35.7%). (A double-blind placebo-controlled randomized study of Chinese herbal medicine as complementary therapy for reduction of chemotherapy-induced toxicity. *Ann Oncol.* 2007 Apr;18(4):768-74).

Smoking marijuana eases HIV-related nerve pain

In a randomised placebo-controlled trial, HIV patients smoking cannabis experienced a 34% reduction in neuropathic foot pain, a rate double that experienced by control patients (17%). Fifty patients with HIV-associated sensory neuropathy were randomly assigned to smoke either cannabis or identical placebo cigarettes (from which the cannabinoids had been removed) three times daily for five days. Greater than 30% reduction in pain was reported by 52% in the cannabis group and by 24% in the placebo group. The first cannabis cigarette reduced chronic pain by 72% vs 15% with placebo. Cannabis smoking also reduced sensitivity to experimentally induced painful stimuli. The results mean that cannabis-induced analgesia can be considered comparable to that provided by oral drugs used for chronic neuropathic pain. (Cannabis in painful HIV-associated sensory neuropathy: a randomized placebo-controlled trial. *Neurology.* 2007 Feb 13;68(7):515-21).

Qigong training improves exercise capacity

Qigong training can increase the exercise capacity of patients with cardiac impairment. A controlled trial enlisted thirty men and thirteen women, average age 68, suffering from chronic atrial fibrillation. They were randomised to either a 16-week medically assisted qigong training program or to a waiting-list control group. Functional capacity variation was evaluated by measuring how far patients could walk during six minutes, assessed at baseline, at the end of the intervention, and after a further 16 weeks. Patients trained in qigong walked an average 114 metres more (27%) at the end of treatment and 57 metres more (13.7%) 16 weeks later. Control subjects showed no variation in functional capacity. (Functional capacity after traditional Chinese medicine (qi gong) training in patients with chronic atrial fibrillation: a randomized controlled trial. *Prev Cardiol.* 2007 Winter;10(1):22-5).

Qigong training reduces computer operators' stress

A study has investigated the effects of qigong on stress among computer operators. Ten women were included in a qigong exercise group and an equal number in a control group. Heart rate, blood pressure and finger temperature were measured at the beginning and end of the working day over a period of five weeks. Twenty-four hour urine samples were collected in the first and last weeks to measure catecholamine excretion in urine. Participants kept a daily record of psychological measures of strain and weekly measures of stress levels. Qigong was found to significantly reduce noradrenaline excretion in urine and influenced heart rate and body temperature, indicating reduced activity of the sympathetic nervous system. It also reduced painful low-back symptoms. (Qigong reduces stress in computer operators. *Complement Ther Clin Pract.* 2007 May;13(2):78-84).

Tai chi improves diabetic health

Practising tai chi may help boost immune function and improve blood sugar control in people with type-2 diabetes. Thirty-two people participated in three hour-long tai chi sessions each week, for a period of 12 weeks. Investigators found statistically significant reductions in levels of glycosylated haemoglobin (A1C) in the blood of participants, indicating improved long-term blood glucose control. Increased numbers of regulatory and killer T cells were also found. (Tai chi chuan exercise decreases A1C levels along with increase of regulatory T-cells and decrease of cytotoxic T-cell population in type 2 diabetic patients. *Diabetes Care.* 2007 Mar;30(3):716-8).

Tai chi as good as vaccine against shingles

Tai chi therapy can boost the immune system of patients with shingles to levels comparable to those achieved using a vaccine against varicella zoster virus (VZV, the virus which causes chickenpox and shingles). A controlled

trial randomised 112 healthy adults aged 59 to 86, who had a history of varicella infection, to Tai Chi Chih (TCC, a simplified, standardised form of tai chi) or health education (HE) for 25 weeks. After 16 weeks of intervention, subjects were vaccinated against VZV. The results of blood tests showed that TCC alone increased immunity against VZV by an amount comparable to that induced by varicella vaccine in the HE group. Furthermore, the effects of the two were additive; TCC, together with varicella vaccine, produced a substantially higher level of immunity against VZV than vaccine alone, raising it to levels usually observed in adults 30 years younger. The tai chi group also showed significant improvements in scores for physical functioning, bodily pain, vitality, and mental health. (Augmenting immune responses to varicella zoster virus in older adults: a randomized, controlled trial of tai chi. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2007 Apr;55(4):511-7).

Tai chi decreases sympathetic nervous activity

Performance of tai chi leads to a decrease in activity of the sympathetic nervous system, to levels that are not achieved by performing comparable physical activity alone. Participants had completed the above 25-week randomised trial of Tai Chi Chih (TCC), vs health education (HE). TCC practitioners performed TCC for 20 minutes, while HE participants passively rested for the same time. Investigators measured various cardiovascular parameters before and after the task. A subsample of participants returned for a second evaluation and performed videotape-guided stretching for 20 minutes to evaluate the cardiovascular effects of slow-moving physical activity. TCC performance was found to significantly decrease sympathetic nervous system activity (measured from electrocardiogram readings). In contrast, there was no change in sympathetic activity following passive rest or slow-moving physical activity. (Tai Chi Chih acutely decreases sympathetic nervous system activity in older adults.

J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 2006 Nov;61(11):1177-80)

Exercise cuts young adults' hypertension risk

Exercising while young has a positive effect on blood pressure. 3993 women and men, aged between 18-30 at baseline, were tracked for 15 years. Participants were examined at baseline and 2, 5, 7, 10 and 15 years later. Blood pressure and physical activity were measured each time. Overall, 634 participants developed high blood pressure during the 15-year period. Those who exercised an average of five times a week and burned 300 calories per exercise session were 17% less likely to develop hypertension than those who were less active, the study found. The risk of developing hypertension during follow-up dropped by 11% for every 1,500 calories burned through weekly exercise (Physical activity in young adults and incident hypertension over 15 years of follow-up: the CARDIA study. *Am J Public Health.* 2007 Apr;97(4):703-9).

Exercise prevents breast cancer

Regular strenuous physical activity may protect women against developing breast cancer. A cohort of 110,599 female teachers, aged 20-79 years, with no history of breast cancer was followed for seven years. During that time, 2649 were diagnosed as having invasive breast cancer and 593 were diagnosed as having in situ breast cancer. At the start of the study, the participants were asked about their lifetime exercise habits. The research rated activities such as swimming, aerobics, running and jogging as 'strenuous', whereas activities such as brisk walking and golf were rated as 'moderate'. Analysis revealed that women who had engaged in regular, strenuous physical activity for more than five hours a week since high school were 31% less likely to develop early-stage breast cancer and 20% less likely to develop invasive breast cancer than those who had engaged in less than 30 minutes of strenuous exercise per week. (Long-term recreational physical activity and

risk of invasive and in situ breast cancer: the California teachers study. *Arch Intern Med.* 2007 Feb 26;167(4):408-15).

Exercise improves prostate pain

Men who suffer from chronic prostatitis can gain relief by engaging in aerobic exercise. A volunteer sample of 231 males aged 20-50 years old with chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain syndrome, who were unresponsive to conventional treatments, were randomly assigned to an aerobic exercise group or a placebo group, consisting of stretching and motion exercise. A variety of measures showed significant improvement from baseline in both groups. However, improvements in the aerobic group were significantly greater than in the placebo group for chronic prostatitis symptom scores, quality of life measures and visual analogue pain scores. (Physical activity of men with chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain syndrome not satisfied with conventional treatments-could it represent a valid option? The physical activity and male pelvic pain trial: a double-blind, randomised study. *J Urol.* 2007 Jan;177(1):159-65).

Black tea reduces ovarian cancer risk

The effect of black tea consumption on ovarian cancer risk was recently investigated. A case-control study included 414 women with primary epithelial ovarian, fallopian or peritoneal cancer and 868 age- and region- matched women with non-neoplastic conditions. Compared to women who did not drink black tea, women with a usual consumption of at least two cups a day experienced a 30% decline in ovarian cancer risk. Similar declines were noted among individuals consuming two or more cups of decaffeinated coffee daily, but no association was noted between any level of caffeinated coffee consumption and risk of ovarian cancer. The authors speculate that the chemoprotective effects of phytochemicals in black tea and decaffeinated coffee may be important, and that these may be counteracted in regular coffee by the elevated risk

associated with its higher caffeine content. (Consumption of black tea or coffee and risk of ovarian cancer. *Int J Gynecol Cancer.* 2007 Jan-Feb;17(1):50-4).

Decreasing caffeine has no effect on pregnancy

Evidence on the relationship between caffeine consumption during pregnancy and prematurity/low birth weight has been inconclusive, with some studies showing an association while others have not. A new study sought to clarify the situation. 1207 pregnancies among healthy women who drank more than three cups of coffee a day (considered a high caffeine intake) were monitored from before 20 weeks gestation. The group was divided in half randomly, and one half was provided with caffeinated, the other decaffeinated, coffee. They were not told which they were given. Regular monitoring of participants took place by interview to ascertain caffeine intake, including contributions from sources such as tea and cola. The results showed no difference in either the length of pregnancy or birth weight between the two groups. (Effect of reducing caffeine intake on birth weight and length of gestation: randomised controlled trial. *BMJ.* 2007 (24 February);334:409).

Mum + fish = clever child

Eating seafood while pregnant is beneficial for the cognitive development of the child. In a long-term longitudinal observational study, 11,875 pregnant women completed a food frequency questionnaire four times during pregnancy and then periodically answered questions about their children's social and developmental outcomes. Children of mothers who ate small amounts of seafood were more likely to have suboptimum neurodevelopmental outcomes than those of mothers who ate more. Maternal seafood intake during pregnancy of less than 340g per week (the current maximum intake recommended for pregnant mothers by the US Environmental Protection Administration and Food and Drug Administration) was

associated with increased risk of children being in the bottom 25% of verbal IQ at eight years of age and with suboptimum performance on tests of social behaviour, fine motor activity, communication and social development. The results show that the benefits of eating more than 340g seafood per week while pregnant greatly outweigh any potential harm from exposure to trace contaminants (such as mercury) in the food. The authors believe that the benefits are likely to be due to the high content of omega-3 fatty acids in fish, which are essential for optimum neural development. (Maternal seafood consumption in pregnancy and neurodevelopmental outcomes in childhood (ALSPAC study): an observational cohort study. *Lancet.* 2007 Feb 17;369(9561):578-85).

Fish = emotional healing

One of the authors of the above maternal fish consumption study was also involved in a critical literature survey investigating links between the cultural symbolism of fish and the psychotropic effects of eating it. The survey found that fish have been culturally labelled as symbols of emotional well-being and social healing in religious and medical practices for at least six millennia. The authors postulate that fish symbolism has become associated with the positive emotional states induced by consumption of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. Consumption of these oils, found in high concentrations in seafood, has been found to reduce depression, aggression and anger while improving mental well-being. They point to evidence that formation of emotional memory (in the hippocampus and limbic system) and the processing of social context (in the cortex) appears to be optimised by diets rich in long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. They suggest using this cultural perception of fish as a symbolically healing food in public health improvement messages. (Cultural symbolism of fish and the psychotropic properties of omega-3 fatty acids. Prostaglandins *Leukot Essent Fatty Acids.* 2006 Oct-Nov;75(4-5):227-36).

Garlic does NOT lower cholesterol

Studies evaluating garlic as a cholesterol-lowering agent have produced conflicting results. This trial evaluated the effect of raw garlic and two commonly used garlic supplements on cholesterol levels in adults with moderate hypercholesterolaemia. For the parallel-design trial, 192 adults were randomly assigned to one of four treatment arms: raw garlic, powdered garlic supplement, aged garlic extract supplement, or placebo. Garlic product doses equivalent to an average-sized garlic clove were consumed six times per week for six months. Fasting plasma lipid concentrations were assessed monthly with the primary outcome measure being low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) concentration. No statistically significant effects of the three forms of garlic on plasma LDL-C levels were found. (Effect of raw garlic vs commercial garlic supplements on plasma lipid concentrations in adults with moderate hypercholesterolemia: a randomized clinical trial. *Arch Intern Med.* 2007 Feb 26;167(4):346-53).

Cured meat bad for lungs

Frequent consumption of cured meats has been associated with decreased lung function and increased risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). A cross-sectional study evaluated 7352 people aged 45 or older. Participants' lung function was tested using spirometry to measure forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV1) and forced vital capacity (FVC). Food intake was evaluated by questionnaire. After adjustment for age, smoking and other confounders, frequency of cured meat consumption was inversely associated with FEV1. Comparing the highest with the lowest category of cured meat consumption, those who ate most cured meat had a 78% higher risk of developing COPD compared with those who ate it least. Cured meats are high in nitrites, which generate reactive nitrogen species that may cause damage to the lung, resulting in emphysema. (Cured meat consumption, lung function, and chronic

obstructive pulmonary disease among United States adults. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med.* 2007 Apr 15;175(8):798-804).

Reduced salt = improved heart health

Reducing the amount of sodium in the diet has previously been shown to lower blood pressure. New evidence suggests that it may also reduce the long-term risk of cardiovascular events. In two previous studies, more than 3000 participants with prehypertension were randomised to a reduced sodium intake for 18 months or 36-48 months or to a control arm. The new study consisted of a long-term follow-up assessed 10-15 years after the original trials. The results showed that people originally allocated to either sodium reduction group had a 30% lower incidence of cardiovascular events in the next 15 years, irrespective of sex, ethnic origin, age, body mass and blood pressure. (Long term effects of dietary sodium reduction on cardiovascular disease outcomes: observational follow-up of the trials of hypertension prevention (TOHP). *BMJ.* 2007 Apr 28;334(7599):885).

Long term risks of low-carb diet

A new Swedish study suggests that middle-aged women who follow Atkins-style diets risk shortening their lives. The cohort study, initiated in Sweden during 1991-1992, included a 12-year follow up. 42,237 women volunteers from a random population sample, 30-49 years old at baseline, completed an extensive questionnaire assessing their consumption frequency and quantity of around 80 foods and beverages. They were traced until 2003. Researchers found that women with a lower intake of total carbohydrates and higher intake of total proteins, in comparison with those with a higher intake of total carbohydrates and lower intake of total proteins, had significantly higher all cause mortality and, in particular, cardiovascular mortality. (Low carbohydrate-high protein diet and mortality in a cohort of Swedish women. *J Intern Med.* 2007 Apr;261(4):366-74).

Low-fat dairy products linked to infertility

Consumption of low-fat dairy products has been linked to an increased risk of infertility due to lack of ovulation. A prospective study followed 18,555 married women aged 24-42, without a history of infertility, who attempted a pregnancy or became pregnant during an 8-year period. During follow-up, 438 women reported infertility due to an ovulatory disorder. If women ate two or more servings of low-fat dairy foods a day, their risk of anovulatory infertility increased by more than 85% compared with women who ate less than one serving of low-fat dairy food a week. Eating at least one serving of high-fat dairy food a day reduced the risk of anovulatory infertility by 27% compared to women who consumed one or fewer high-fat dairy servings a week. (A prospective study of dairy foods intake and anovulatory infertility. *Hum Reprod.* 2007 May;22(5):1340-7).

Vegetables cut prostate risk

Eating a diet high in vegetables, particularly those rich in beta-carotene, can reduce the risk of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). The data comes from more than 32,000 male health care workers enrolled in a long-term health study, which began in 1986. By 2000, a total of 6,092 men had had surgery or moderate to high symptoms of urinary problems associated with BPH. Researchers found that high consumption of vegetables (but not fruit) seemed particularly beneficial for preventing BPH. In addition, consumption of vegetables rich in certain antioxidants (beta-carotene, lutein, and vitamin C) were associated with reduced risk of BPH. (Fruit and vegetable consumption, intake of micronutrients, and benign prostatic hyperplasia in US men. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2007 Feb;85(2):523-9).

Whole-grain cereals reduce coronary risk

New data from a meta-analysis reviewing the effect of whole-grain foods on coronary heart disease (CHD) has shown that whole-grain cereals can

reduce CHD risk factors, with specific reductions in total- and LDL- cholesterol levels. Investigators caution, however, that existing studies are small and of short duration, and results should therefore be interpreted cautiously. (Wholegrain cereals for coronary heart disease. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2007 Apr 18;(2):CD005051).

Childhood obesity causes early puberty

Researchers have found a strong association between obesity and the early onset of puberty in girls. A longitudinal study followed 354 girls from age three to age 12, recording their weight at regular intervals and monitoring for signs of puberty. About 30% of the children were overweight or obese at the age of nine. Higher body mass index (BMI) scores, at all ages, were found to have a strong association with earlier onset of puberty. For every extra point on the girls' BMI scores at age three, the odds of having earlier puberty increased by 44%. Early puberty is associated with increased psychological and social problems, such as early alcohol consumption, sexual activity and smoking. (Weight status in young girls and the onset of puberty. *Pediatrics*. 2007 Mar;119(3):e624-30).

Obese men less suicide prone

A study has examined the relationship between suicide and body mass index. As part of a prospective long-term cohort study involving 46,755 male health professionals, participants reported their height, weight, diet, and physical activity on repeated occasions from 1986 until 2002. A total of 131 men died from suicide during follow-up. The risk of suicide declined as BMI increased from 52 per 100,000 person-years among men with a BMI of less than 21, to 13 per 100,000 among men with a BMI of 30 or higher. The researchers surmised that higher amounts of insulin in the obese men may increase their serotonin levels. (As William Shakespeare said "Let me have men about me that are fat; Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights: Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look; He

thinks too much). (Body mass index and risk of suicide among men. *Arch Intern Med*. 2007 Mar 12;167(5):468-75).

High blood sugar is a global killer

A new study puts high blood glucose among the top five causes of mortality worldwide. Investigators used data collated from a variety of sources covering 52 countries. They calculated that higher-than-optimum blood glucose levels are responsible for 21% of deaths from ischaemic heart disease and 13% of deaths from stroke worldwide. When added to the number of deaths from diabetes, this puts elevated blood sugar in the top five causes of worldwide mortality, accounting for 3.16 million deaths annually. (Global and regional mortality from ischaemic heart disease and stroke attributable to higher-than-optimum blood glucose concentration: comparative risk assessment. *Lancet*. 2006 Nov 11;368(9548):1651-9).

Older mothers risk stillbirth

Advanced maternal age is a risk factor for stillbirth. A cross-sectional study was conducted using the United States Centers for Disease Control perinatal mortality database, which catalogues 11,061,599 singleton deliveries between 1995 and 1997. The authors calculated that women aged 40-44 have a three times higher risk of stillbirth than women aged 25- 29. (Advanced Maternal Age (AMA) is an Independent Predictor of Intrauterine Fetal Death at Term. Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine 27th Annual Meeting, February 2007).

Caesarean rate reaches 25%

Nearly a quarter of all births in NHS hospitals are being carried out by Caesarean section, according to a report from the Office of Health Economics. The report, based on data collected in 2005, confirms the growing trend towards birth by C-section. Authors attribute the increase to a variety of factors, but the main contribution is from an increase in the numbers of emergency Caesareans.

They speculate that this is in part because women are delaying childbirth until later in life and also because mothers are becoming heavier, both associated with birth complications. Doctors' fear of litigation is also identified as a factor driving up the rate. They report that contribution to the rising C-section rate from elective operations is minimal, as numbers of these appear to have stabilised in recent years. (Rising UK birth rates and causes of increasing numbers of caesarean deliveries. <http://www.ohe.org/object/download.cfm?lib=liDownload&id=524>).

Low birth weight makes girls prone to depression

Girls weighing less than 2.5 kg at birth are more likely to develop depression during puberty. A representative population-based sample of 1420 children was evaluated annually between the ages of nine and 16 years for psychiatric disorders. After controlling for other perinatal, childhood and adolescent adverse factors, low birth weight (LBW) was found to predict female adolescent depression. Girls who experienced no other risk factors except LBW were not at increased risk for adolescent depression. However if a LBW girl had just one other risk factor (for example teenage pregnancy or sexual abuse) her odds of developing depression increased to 19.6% vs 3.6% for normal birth weight girls. If she had two more risk factors, the risk rose to 68.5% vs 19.7%. LBW was not a predictor of other psychiatric disorders in either sex. The findings support a 'foetal programming' hypothesis for depression. According to this hypothesis, LBW is a marker for poor intrauterine conditions that provoke adjustments in foetal development. Although these adaptations optimise survival in the womb, they may later impair girls' ability to cope with stress, lowering their thresholds for stress-triggered illness and making LBW girls vulnerable to adversities after puberty. (Prediction from low birth weight to female adolescent depression: a test of competing hypotheses. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2007 Mar;64(3):338-44).

Long-lived parents = low heart risk

People with long-lived parents have better cardiovascular risk profiles in middle age compared with those whose parents died younger. In a group of 1697 offspring, average age 40, 11% had at least two parents who survived to 85 years or older, 47% had one parent who lived to that age, and 42% had two parents who died before 85. People whose parents had both survived to 85 or beyond tended to have normal blood pressure, lower levels of LDL cholesterol and fewer other risk factors for cardiovascular disease. After 12 years of follow up, the offspring of longer-lived parents were also less likely to progress to high blood pressure and to generate higher risk scores, (Characteristics of Framingham offspring participants with long-lived parents. *Arch Intern Med.* 2007 Mar 12;167(5):438-44).

Napping is a lifesaver

Taking a siesta in the middle of the day can reduce the risk of death from heart disease, particularly in young healthy men. Data came from a prospective investigation of a general population cohort of 23,681 individuals, who at enrolment had no history of coronary heart disease, stroke or cancer. Participants were asked how frequently and for how long they napped and their dietary habits and physical activity were also recorded to exclude these as confounding variables. Follow-up was for six years. It was found that those occasionally napping had a 12% lower rate of coronary mortality, whereas those systematically napping (a 30-minute siesta at least three times a week) had 37% lower coronary mortality. The inverse association between coronary mortality and napping was particularly evident among men who were working at the time of enrolment (64% reduced risk of coronary death). Authors speculate that the coronary benefits of a daytime siesta may be due to reduced stress levels. (Siesta in healthy adults and coronary mortality in the general population. *Arch Intern Med.* 2007 Feb 12;167(3):296-301).

Perfectionists prone to IBS

Perfectionists are more prone to developing irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) after an infection. A prospective study recruited 620 primary care patients with a positive test for *Campylobacter* gastroenteritis, who had no previous history of bowel complaints. They completed a questionnaire at the time of infection, which included standardised measures of mood, perceived stress, perfectionism, negative illness beliefs and illness behaviours. At three and six months after initial infection, participants completed follow-up questionnaires designed to determine whether they met Rome criteria for IBS. Analysis of the data indicated that those who developed IBS (49 people) had significantly higher levels of perceived stress, anxiety, somatisation (expression of psychological problems as physical symptoms) and negative illness beliefs at the time of infection than those who did not develop IBS. IBS cases were also significantly more likely to remain active in the face of their acute symptoms until they felt forced to rest ('all-or-nothing behaviour') and significantly less likely to initially rest in response to their acute illness. (The cognitive behavioural model of irritable bowel syndrome: a prospective investigation of gastroenteritis patients. *Gut.* 2007 Feb 26; [Epub ahead of print] 2007;0:1-6. doi: 10.1136/gut.2006.108811).

Psychoanalysis effective for panic attacks

The first randomised controlled clinical efficacy trial of psychodynamic psychotherapy for panic disorder has found it to be effective. Forty-nine adults aged 18-55 diagnosed with panic disorder received either panic-focused psychodynamic psychotherapy or applied relaxation training in twice-weekly sessions for 12 weeks. Subjects in the psychotherapy group showed a significantly greater reduction in severity of panic symptoms and improvement in psychosocial functioning, compared with those in the relaxation group. (A randomized controlled clinical trial of psychoanalytic psychotherapy for

panic disorder. *Am J Psychiatry.* 2007 Feb;164(2):265-72).

Loneliness increases dementia risk

Elderly people who are lonely are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's disease (AD). 823 older persons, who were free of dementia at enrolment, were recruited for a longitudinal cohort study. At baseline and yearly intervals for up to four years, participants underwent evaluations including detailed cognitive function testing, clinical classification of dementia and AD and assessment of loneliness. Risk of AD was more than doubled in lonely people compared with those who were not lonely. Loneliness was associated with lower levels of cognition at baseline and with more rapid cognitive decline during follow-up. (Loneliness and risk of Alzheimer disease. *Arch Gen Psychiatry.* 2007 Feb;64(2):234-40)

Chronic pain rising in USA

Chronic pain is increasing in prevalence among the US workforce as Americans age and lead more sedentary lifestyles. The data, from a national survey conducted in 2006, shows a 38% rise in chronic pain over the last decade. (Pain in the Workplace. <http://www.painandwork.com>).

Health care to reach 20% of US spending by 2016

Health care spending in the USA is expected to reach almost 20% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the next decade. America already has the highest per-capita health spending in the world; the current figure is 16.0% of GDP per annum. Forecasts from the US government Department of Health and Human Services predict an annual spend of \$4.1 trillion on health by 2016. (NHE Projections 2006-2016, Forecast summary and selected tables. <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalHealthExpendData/downloads/proj2006.pdf>).

Insulated homes are healthier

Insulating homes to make them less cold

and damp leads to improved health and results in fewer days taken off school and work. In a single-blinded randomised cluster study, 1350 un-insulated homes situated in low-income neighbourhoods were identified. Half of the homes were fitted with a standard insulation package while the other half were left uninsulated. Insulating houses led to a significantly warmer, drier indoor environment and resulted in improved self-rated health, self-reported wheezing, days off school and work, and visits to general practitioners as well as a trend for fewer hospital admissions for respiratory conditions. (Effect of insulating existing houses on health inequality: cluster randomised study in the community. *BMJ*. 2007 Mar 3;334(7591):460).

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