



Summertime and the living is squeezezy ... Tourists in Suining, Daying County, China, pack together in an artificial wave pool to escape the heat.

From The Cochrane Library

Brought to you by the letter C: contraceptives, cancer, cocoa, computers

Proof that Cochrane is about more than randomised trials comes in the form of a review of 14 observational studies (cohort and case-control studies) that indicates there is no overall association between oral contraceptives and bone fractures in women, although there may be an increased risk for users of depot medroxyprogesterone acetate, and a decreased risk for hormonal intrauterine devices (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD009849.pub2).

Two new reviews herald the benefits of exercise for cancer survivors as well as people undergoing active cancer treatment. The reviews draw on data from nearly 100 studies involving over 8000 participants comprising activities such as walking, cycling, strength training and yoga. Benefits for both groups included overall health-related quality of life and specific measures

such as emotional wellbeing, social functioning, fatigue and pain (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD007566.pub2; doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD008465.pub2). Despite the large number of studies, questions remain over which attributes of exercise — mode, intensity, frequency and duration — give optimal effects.

Consider grabbing a bar of dark chocolate on your way out for your daily walk. A review of 20 studies involving over 800 healthy participants revealed a reduction of blood pressure with intake of flavanol-rich cocoa products. Sadly, the effect was small (2–3 mmHg) and the studies all short term (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD008893.pub2).

The effect of cocoa is even more interesting in light of the findings of another review that in adults with mild hypertension and no cardiovascular disease, antihypertensive drugs have not been shown to reduce mortality or

morbidity (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD006742.pub2). The authors suggest more people may choose non-drug treatments, such as diet, exercise and stress management.

Of course, chocolate is not without its own dangers. A new review reveals that interactive computer-based weight loss interventions are better than nothing, but no substitute for face-to-face programs (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD007675.pub2). This will come as no surprise to personal trainers, who would be quick to point out that computers can't detect cheating in quite the same way.

Other new and updated reviews this month cover everything from corticosteroids for the common cold and phlebotonics for haemorrhoids to image-guided glucocorticoid injections for shoulder pain. *The Cochrane Library* can be found at www.thecochranelibrary.com.

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News

Alcohol-energy drinks have double edge

Young Australians who drink combined alcohol-energy drinks are less likely to engage in risky behaviours than when they consume drinks containing only alcohol, a Tasmanian study has found. The study, which surveyed 400 young adults, found beverages that combine caffeinated energy drinks and alcohol produce a “double-edged effect”. The increased stimulation from energy drinks may negate the sedation of alcohol, but it could also lead to negative physiological effects associated with overstimulation, the researchers found. The odds of engaging in 26 risky behaviours, such as drug use, drink driving and unsafe sex, were less when participants drank alcohol mixed with energy drinks than when they drank alcohol alone.

Alcohol Clin Exp Res 2012; 15 August (online)



How to keep homegrown doctors

A new study provides clues on how low-income countries can select medical students who are more likely to work in their own country after graduation. Researchers tracked more than 700 doctors who graduated from Nepal's first medical college, the Institute of Medicine, between 1983 and 2004. Of these graduates, 37% were working in the capital, Kathmandu, 27% were working in Nepal but outside Kathmandu, and 36% were working in foreign countries. Those who had trained as paramedics before studying medicine were twice as likely to stay in Nepal and 3.5 times as likely to work in rural Nepal compared with students with a college science background.

BMJ 2012; 14 August (online)

Screening offers little help with partner violence

Screening for partner violence does not improve quality of life for women, a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has found. Women attending primary care clinics in Illinois, in the United States, were randomly allocated to one of three groups: a universal screening group in which those who screened positive for experiences of physical violence or fear in partner relationships received a list of resources; a no-screening group who received resources; and a control group. The study found no differences between the three groups in quality-of-life indicators. An editorial in the same issue said the results should encourage the focus away from universal screening, which is favoured in the US — administering standard questions to all patients — and towards identifying and providing clinical and social services to women who show signs of abuse.

JAMA 2012; 15 August (online)

Survey reveals worldwide tobacco use

An international survey of 3 billion people has found that 49% of men and 11% of women use tobacco products. Although women's tobacco use rates remain low, women are beginning to smoke as early as men, at around age 17 years instead of in their 20s, according to findings of the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) published in *The Lancet*. The authors said GATS was the largest tobacco use prevalence study ever reported in the scientific literature. The study focused on 14 low- and middle-income GATS countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam, and made comparisons with the United States and the United Kingdom. The authors said the findings showed the urgent need for policy change in low- and middle-income countries.

Lancet 2012; 18 August (online)

From the MJA archives

MJA 1936; 22 August (edited extract)

A manual for marriage

The demand for such books as *A marriage manual: a practical guide to sex and marriage*, by Drs Hannah and Abraham Stone, is a curious and significant sign of the times.

The information in the *Marriage manual* is comprehensive and clear; the style is dignified and reticent. But the dialogue form is not happy. The picture of a pair of lovers listening to a long and sometimes tedious exposition on all possible aspects of their future state is a trifle ludicrous. Can one imagine Romeo and Juliet undergoing this conscientious preparation before adventuring?

This particular book is a good example of a type that has become



a bestseller in recent years. We wonder for whom these books are intended. They are not for the poor; the poor would have little need or use for any of the information, except perhaps that on contraception. They are neither for the rich nor for the intellectual. Perhaps, for numerous intelligent, well meaning people whose knowledge of life and literature is limited and upon whom the repressive puritan tradition has weighed most heavily, certain chapters of this book may bring consolation and liberation from fear.

Treatment success with post-traumatic stress

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is effective in treating patients who have both post-traumatic stress disorder and substance dependence, an Australian study has found. The study of 100 patients looked at the efficacy of adding prolonged exposure therapy (a form of CBT) to usual treatments for drug dependence, compared with usual treatments alone. The addition of prolonged exposure therapy led to a greater reduction in post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. The study included individuals with complex problems, who have often been excluded from earlier trials. “These findings challenge the widely held view that patients need to be abstinent before any trauma work is commenced”, the researchers said.

JAMA 2012; 308: 690-699