



With the Tour de France underway, a Canadian study has found that when it comes to warm-up, less may be more. Researchers at the University of Calgary compared the effects of a traditional, longer warm-up with a shorter, milder warm-up on 10 competitive cyclists. The shorter warm-up produced less muscle fatigue but more cycling power output, they reported in the Journal of Applied Physiology recently. The findings may interest Tour de France cyclists, pictured during the first stage of the race between Liege and Seraing in Belgium.

From The Cochrane Library

Do you see what we see?

Maybe not, if your vision is obscured by cataract or macular degeneration. A review of nine studies involving 117 000 participants, with follow-up ranging from 2 to 12 years, has concluded that antioxidant vitamin supplementation does not prevent or slow the progression of age-related cataracts (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD004567.pub2). Similarly, an updated review involving 65 000 participants found no apparent effect of vitamin E or β -carotene supplementation for preventing or delaying the onset of age-related macular degeneration (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD000253.pub3).

While we are busy debunking dietary disease-prevention strategies, we can add to the list omega-3 fatty acid supplementation for preventing cognitive decline and dementia. An updated review of three high-quality trials involving 3500 participants found no benefit on cognitive function in cognitively healthy people aged

over 60 years at 24 or 40 months (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD005379.pub3).

Of course there are conditions for which dietary strategies are a vital element. A review of 17 studies of enhanced glucose control shows that more aggressive attempts to lower sugar levels do appear to delay the onset of neuropathy in patients with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. However, this approach significantly increases the risk of severe hypoglycaemic episodes and other serious adverse events (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD007543.pub2).

Down syndrome comes under the microscope in the latest diagnostic test review. The accuracy of serum markers for the detection of Down syndrome was assessed in 59 studies involving 340 000 pregnancies. The review showed that tests using two or three markers in combination with maternal age are significantly better than those using one. The benefit of including inhibin as a marker has not

been established (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD009925).

Looks can be deceiving. What at first glance we thought was a review of “group-based parenting” (sounds like a great idea) turned out to be the more prosaic “group-based parent training”. Happily, this is also a great idea, at least in showing short-term improvements in parental psychosocial functioning (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD002020.pub3).

The latest instalment of the review to determine the effect of audit and feedback in improving clinical practice and outcomes is out this month. Now groaning under the weight of 140 studies, audit and feedback leads to small but important improvements in professional practice, and varies according to baseline performance and how the feedback is provided. But you saw this coming, didn't you? (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD000259.pub3). The Cochrane Library can be found at www.thecochranelibrary.com.

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doi: 10.5694/mja12.10888

News

Quantity beats quality when doctors chase targets

Setting work targets for doctors increases clinical productivity but has an unfavourable impact on the quality of patient care, teaching and research, a US study has found. The researchers surveyed 137 physicians in a large academic medical centre in which targets for physician productivity, such as patient load, had recently been introduced. The study found that nearly half the doctors were more inclined to take on clinical activities after the targets were implemented. However, the increase in clinical work was not always in the patients' best interests, with doctors reporting they spent less time with each patient. More than half the doctors surveyed felt that, after the targets were introduced, the quality of care had declined, the numbers of tests and procedures ordered had increased, and patients were worse off.

Work targets also adversely affected non-clinical work, with 86% of physicians reporting they were less inclined to perform activities that did not count toward the targets. Three-quarters reported a decrease in time spent teaching and half said they spent less time involved in research. "Physicians made it very clear that they were less willing to teach", the researchers said. "If our findings hold true, medical schools and training programs should begin to monitor trainees to ensure that quality of education is not being harmed."

Arch Intern Med 2012; 172: 967-969

From the MJA archives

MJA 1959; 11 July (edited extract)

Swept under the carpet

SIR, —

One hundred and eighty-five years ago the eminent London surgeon, Percival Pott, published a paper drawing attention to the high incidence of cancer of the scrotum in chimney sweeps. Later investigation showed that this type of cancer is much more frequent in all those whose work exposes them to soot, tar and mineral oils.

At the present time we are faced with similar and equally convincing evidence that inhaling soot and tar into the lungs from cigarettes is associated with the development of cancer, and the question is whether or not we still retain a sufficient residue of common sense possessed by our ancestors to take the necessary steps to reduce this serious hazard. It is now



just 30 years since I first heard a physician state that there was a relationship between smoking, bronchitis and lung cancer, yet in that long period no practical steps have been taken to reduce that risk, and we continue to wait while parlour scientists dream up fantastic theories, and the tobacco companies intensify their sales campaigns.

Yours, etc,
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Hunger pains: fasters choose chips over veges

People coming off a fast are more likely to tuck into French fries than vegetables, a study has found. US researchers randomly divided 128 university students into two groups: one group fasted for 18 hours, the control group did not. At lunch after the fast, both groups were offered a buffet of two starches (bread rolls and French fries), two proteins (chicken and cheese) and two vegetables (carrots and green beans). More than one-third (35%) of the fasting group started with a starch, compared with 13% in the non-fasting group, of whom 56% ate a vegetable first. The study also found that people tended to eat more of the first food they chose after a fast. The researchers said their study showed that even people with mild food deprivation, such as dieters, would be drawn to unhealthy foods. "Hospitals and cafeterias that deal with food-deprived individuals should make healthier foods ... much more convenient, visible and enticing than starches to avoid such biasing of choices", they said.



Arch Intern Med 2012; 172: 961-962

Children spared toxic radiotherapy

Children with low-risk Hodgkin lymphoma who are treated with chemotherapy alone have similar survival rates to those treated with both chemotherapy and radiotherapy, a US study has found. More than 90% of children with low-risk Hodgkin lymphoma survive for 5 years or more, but many suffer the toxic effects of radiotherapy.

In the study, 88 children had two cycles of chemotherapy and were assessed for early response. Children who were not complete responders received two more courses of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, while complete responders only received two more courses of chemotherapy. As a result, more than half the patients were spared radiotherapy.

The study found that 2-year event-free survival was similar for those treated with chemotherapy alone (89%) to those treated with chemotherapy plus radiotherapy (93%). A comment said the findings highlighted the "continued commitment to reduce complications in the treatment of childhood malignancies and add to the growing body of evidence detailing the utility of early-response-adapted therapy".

JAMA 2012; 307: 2609-2616

JAMA 2012; 307: 2639-2641

Laparoscopic technique best for obese patients

Laparoscopic appendicectomy is superior to open appendicectomy for obese patients. A US study, of more than 13 000 patients with a body mass index of 30 kg/m² or higher, found that laparoscopic appendicectomy was associated with a 57% decrease in morbidity after preoperative risk factors were accounted for. With appendicectomy the most common surgical procedure and with more than 30% of the US population obese, the researchers said it was important to identify the surgical technique that reduced hospital stay and morbidity in the obese patient.

J Am Coll Surg 2012; 215: 88-99

Marge Overs

doi: 10.5694/mja12.n0716