



REUTERS/Stranger

Rescuers and volunteers carry the body of a victim after the retaining wall of a dumpsite collapsed, killing four people and damaging several houses at the height of Typhoon Nanmadol, which hit the northern Philippines late last month.

From *The Cochrane Library*

Diets that work, depression treatments, and bugs to beat common colds

Studies looking at the health benefits of avoiding certain foods during pregnancy and breastfeeding may be good fodder for journalists, but there's little to suggest that they have much impact on rates of atopy in infants. An updated review of antigen-avoidance diets among high-risk women concludes they are "unlikely to reduce substantially the risk of giving birth to an atopic child" (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD000133.pub2).

Diets that live up to their name are rare, so we should welcome the findings of a new review into the long-term effects of weight-reducing diets in hypertensive patients (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD008274). Eight studies of diets over periods ranging

from 6 to 36 months showed weight loss and a decrease in blood pressure. However, the sizes of the reductions are uncertain, and the studies do not adequately report the effects on mortality and morbidity.

Another group in need of a boost are patients with coronary artery disease who are coping with depression. According to a new review of 16 studies, psychological and pharmacological interventions have small but meaningful effects (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD008012.pub2). Psychological treatments also show longer-term benefits, which is good news for those concerned about the adverse effects of antidepressants.

News that probiotics are better than

placebo for preventing acute upper respiratory tract infections, reducing both the number of episodes and antibiotic use (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD006895), may have come too late now that the worst of this year's cold and flu season is behind us, but there's always next year.

Other topics among the 36 new reviews and 37 updated reviews appearing this month in *The Cochrane Library* include acupuncture for autism, myopia and pain in endometriosis (as separate conditions, not a new syndrome!) and prevention programs for alcohol misuse in young people. Something for everyone. *The Cochrane Library* can be found at www.thecochranelibrary.com.

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News

No smoking ... unless it's a hookah

While more young people are butting out their cigarettes, some seem to be simply picking up a smoky water pipe instead, according to new US research. The researchers found that hookah use increased by more than 40% between 2005 and 2008 in California. "This rise is particularly alarming because it's happening in California, a state that leads the nation in tobacco control", said coauthor Dr Wael Al-Delaimy, University of California San Diego. The correlates for hookah use are different from the known correlates for cigarette smoking: hookah use was more common among young, educated, white people. The researchers said that the increasing popularity of hookah smoking could be because hookah lounges are exempt from most state laws restricting public smoking.

Am J Public Health 2011; 18 August (online)



Mesothelioma gene

Although mesothelioma is almost always linked to asbestos exposure, only a small fraction of those exposed develop the cancer. Earlier this month, research in the *MJA* reported an increasing incidence of mesothelioma in Western Australia among people exposed to asbestos during home renovation.¹ Now, research by the US National Cancer Institute has found that certain genetic factors may predispose patients to the disease.² Researchers analysed two families with a high incidence of mesothelioma and other cancers. They found that every person who provided a sample and had mesothelioma or uveal melanoma also carried mutations on the *BAP1* gene. Researchers then sequenced the gene in 26 people who had mesothelioma but no family history of the disease and found that 25% of this group also had mutations on the *BAP1* gene.

1. *MJA* 2011; 195: 271-274.

2. *Nat Genet* 2011; 28 August (online)

Sun shines brighter

If your memories of the 1970s are a little dull, that could be because the light just wasn't as intense back then. Surface UV radiation levels have increased across Australia over the past 30 years, increasing the risk of skin cancer. An analysis of UV and ozone levels led by a Bureau of Meteorology researcher has found that compared with 1970–1980 levels, clear sky UV levels have risen by 2%–6% each year since the 1990s. Increases in the winter UV levels were twice those of summer. Extreme UV levels also seem to be creeping further southward. Regions with an average summer UV in the "extreme" category (11 or more) were 400 km further south in 2000–2009 than in 1970–1980.

Int J Biometeorol 2011; 26 July (online)

From the MJA archives

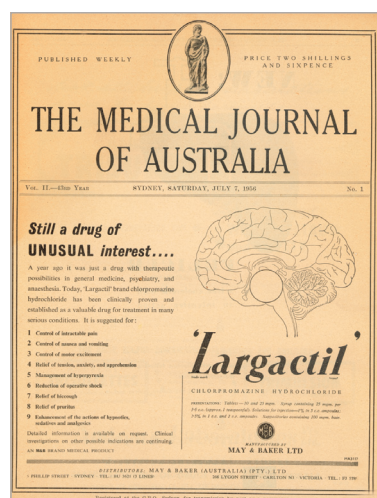
MJA 1951; 29 September

Comment: Physical exercise in health

In civilized life the amount of necessary physical exertion is greatly reduced and is in many cases negligible. This lack may be overcome because of an instinctive urge or as a deliberately undertaken measure of hygiene, but in any case advice on its right use is often needed.

Of the value of exercise appropriate to the individual there can, of course, be no doubt. At least in certain more vigorous forms it provides an outlet for the primitive instincts of aggression, turning into conventionalized channels an urge that the civilized world wishes to see less and less expressed in crude fashion.

Physical benefits may relate to all functions of the body. The circulation is stimulated, and the increased call on cardiac activity tends to educate the body to deal with emergencies.



The bone-marrow is stimulated by temporary oxygen want. The suprarenals reflexly enlarge. The mechanical function of the alimentary canal is stimulated favourably, and this with psychological and other factors benefits appetite and digestive function.

Statins' benefits linger

The apparent benefits of statins just keep accumulating. New UK research has found that patients who were randomly assigned atorvastatin in a major clinical trial that finished 8 years ago continue to have a lower death rate than those given placebo. The lipid-lowering arm of the Anglo-Scandinavian Cardiac Outcomes Trial (ASCOT) was stopped prematurely in 2003, after a median 3.3-year follow-up, because the statin was so effective at preventing heart attacks and strokes. Although most study participants have been taking statins since then, overall mortality is 14% lower in the group originally assigned atorvastatin. Surprisingly, the lower mortality rates are largely due to a reduction in deaths from infection and respiratory illness. The study authors said the pleiotropic effects of statins could contribute to reduced deaths from infection and respiratory illness, but they said there was no definitive explanation for the long-term legacy of the statins.

Eur Heart J 2011; 28 August (online)

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