



Chronic diarrhoea in an elderly woman
Try the picture quiz in **ENDGAMES**, p 771

Despite what we are usually told, being morbidly obese does not seem to affect postoperative outcomes after total hip replacement (except for a marginally increased rate of infection). Over 3000 patients who had hip replacement surgery were stratified into categories of body mass index and followed up for two years. Those classified as morbidly obese had changes in outcome scores that suggested improvement was equal to, if not greater than, that in the non-morbidly obese patients. Withholding surgery on the basis of body mass index is not justified, say the researchers (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (Br)* 2011;93B:321-5, doi:10.1302/0301-620X.93B3.25876).

Anaemia and vitamin D deficiency both cause serious problems and increase with age. Researchers used data from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey to analyse the relation between the two conditions in elderly people and found the prevalence of vitamin D deficiency was 33.3% in the non-anaemic population, 56% in those with anaemia associated with inflammation, and 33% in unexplained anaemia (*Blood* 2011;117:2800-6, doi:10.1182/blood-2010-09-309708). Vitamin D may suppress inflammatory pathways, and vitamin D supplementation may ameliorate anaemia associated with inflammation.

Children with depressed mothers show psychiatric and behavioural problems that lift when the mothers' depression is treated. A study in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* looks at what happens during the first year after the mothers' remission from depression (2011, doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2010.10010032). Children were assessed at three month intervals. During the year of remission, the children of early remitters showed significant improvement on all outcomes. Behavioural problems decreased for children of both early and late remitting mothers but increased in those with non-remitting mothers. Childhood functioning improved only in children whose mothers remitted early.

How do human sperm detect ovulated eggs? The answer lies in an unusual ion channel that could aid the development of a new class of non-hormonal contraception. Progesterone is released by the cumulus cells that surround ovulated eggs. This induces an influx of calcium



A 36 year old married man presented with a generalised itchy rash on his hands, ears, and scalp. He also had a dry cough with breathlessness. Bronchoscopy confirmed *Pneumocystis jirovecii* pneumonia. An HIV test was positive. His CD4 count was $23 \times 10^6/L$. His wife and other family members had also had itchy rashes for months. We diagnosed crusted (Norwegian) scabies. He was treated with permethrin and ivermectin. In ordinary scabies in immunocompetent patients, only 10-15 mites are found whereas in crusted scabies thousands of mites are found, and it is highly infectious. Crusted scabies usually occurs in people who are immunocompromised.

Kathir Yoganathan (kathir.yoganathan@wales.nhs.uk), consultant physician, Susannah Danino, associate specialist, Department of Genitourinary and HIV Medicine, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, Singleton Hospital, Swansea SA2 8QA, UK

Patient consent obtained.

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ions into sperm, increasing their activity and moving them towards the egg. The underlying mechanism seems to be the activation of a pH sensitive calcium channel called CatSper in the sperm (*Nature* 2011;471, doi:10.1038/nature09767 and doi:10.1038/nature09769).

Despite the current obesity epidemic, being underweight in pregnancy remains common, and such women are at risk of several adverse perinatal outcomes. A systematic review and meta-analyses looked at preterm birth and low birth weight in developing and developed countries. Singleton babies born to underweight women have higher risks of preterm birth in developed but not developing countries, whereas the risk of low birthweight babies is higher in underweight women in all countries (*International Journal of Epidemiology* 2011;40:65-101, doi:10.1093/ije/dyq195).

Does the initial intensity of pain in patients with cancer predict their response to opiates? Data from a study of 167 patients referred for treatment of cancer related pain suggests there is no connection—baseline pain intensity did not predict the outcome after an appropriate opioid titration (*European Journal of Cancer* 2011;47:713-7, doi:10.1016/j.ejca.2010.12.020). The authors conclude that the lack of a common, valid, and homogeneously applied method for assessing the results of therapy remains an important challenge in research and clinical practice.

Liquid culture to diagnose tuberculosis was implemented in a remote part of Southern Sudan in 2007. An evaluation of the new system found that the culture was able to detect cases of active tuberculosis (pulmonary and extrapulmonary) that had been missed by conventional smear microscopy. But the long delays in obtaining culture results meant that they were usually not clinically useful, and the high rates of non-tuberculous mycobacteria in the samples made it difficult to interpret the results (*International Journal of Tuberculosis and Lung Disease* 2011;15:405-7).

Syringing wax from ears remains a staple of the practice nurse's workload in the UK. A randomised trial compared the long term effectiveness of using bulb syringes at home for self clearance of earwax with routine care in general practice (*Annals of Family Medicine* 2011;9:110-4, doi:10.1370/afm.1229). In the two year trial follow-up, more control group patients returned with earwax build-up than patients who were irrigating their ears at home.

A Canadian study of baby and toddler food reports that 63% of the products analysed had either high levels of sodium or an excessive proportion of calories coming from sugar (*Journal of Public Health* 2011;33:63-70; doi:10.1093/pubmed/fdq037). In over 53% of products, sugar accounted for more than 20% of the calories. Baby and toddler foods were not found to be nutritionally superior to adult food products with respect to either salt or sugar. The researchers warn that the development of a taste for sweet and salty foods is being promoted from a very young age.

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