

In brief

Picture source: Ben Cooper/LaunchPhotography.com



There is a long history of health-related myths associated with eclipses — the Aztecs, for example, reportedly believed that if a pregnant woman saw an eclipse, the baby would be born with a cleft palate. Today, public health officials struggle to spread the factual message that there is no safe way to directly view a solar eclipse. This amazing image of the total solar eclipse of 14 November 2012 was photographed from a hilltop about 30 km west of the outback town of Mount Carbine in Queensland (http://www.launchphotography.com/Total_Solar_Eclipse_2012.html).

From *The Cochrane Library*

News in all its forms

Collaborative care is a complex intervention modelled on chronic disease management that leads to improvements in outcomes for people with depression and anxiety. That's the good-news conclusion of a review of 79 studies involving more than 24 000 participants. There was clear and robust evidence of improvements that endure over time, although debate is likely to continue over the magnitude of the benefits (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD006525.pub2).

There is also good news for smokers who want to quit: combined pharmacotherapy and behavioural interventions increase smoking cessation. The 41 studies in this review typically involved a combination of nicotine replacement therapy and counselling. As the effects were seen across a variety of settings and populations, clinicians can be confident that encouraging

smokers to use both types of aid is an effective approach (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD008286.pub2).

Here's some potentially uncomfortable news for governments and employers who have invested heavily in the promise of general health checks to deliver public health gains. The current television campaign in which a healthy-looking mother collapses outside a supermarket aims to convince us that health checks save lives. But do they? Authors from the Nordic Cochrane Centre reviewed data from 16 randomised trials involving over 180 000 participants and found that general health checks did not reduce morbidity or mortality, neither overall nor for cardiovascular or cancer causes. The authors suggest that existing testing and preventive measures at the primary care level may explain why an effect has not



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been shown (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD009009.pub2).

The news for researchers, funders and patients participating in treatment trials is thought-provoking. Based on an analysis of 743 publicly sponsored randomised trials involving almost 300 000 patients, society can expect that slightly more than half of new experimental treatments will prove to be better than established treatments, but few will be substantially better. Is this good news or bad news? (doi: 10.1002/14651858.MR000024.pub3).

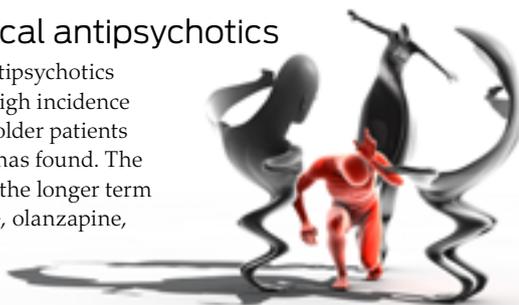
In disappointing news for juice companies, a newly updated review now concludes that cranberry products cannot be recommended for preventing urinary tract infections. The good news is that cranberry juice is still delicious (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD001321.pub5).

Find more news of one sort or another in other new and updated reviews this month in *The Cochrane Library* at www.thecochranelibrary.com.

Caution urged with atypical antipsychotics

Four commonly prescribed atypical antipsychotics (AAPs) lack effectiveness and have a high incidence of adverse effects in middle-aged and older patients with psychotic disorders, US research has found. The stratified randomised study compared the longer term safety and effectiveness of aripiprazole, olanzapine, quetiapine and risperidone in 332 patients aged 40 years and over with psychotic symptoms associated with schizophrenia, mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder or dementia. There was no significant improvement in psychopathology, but there was a high cumulative incidence of metabolic syndrome (36.5% in one year) and of serious (23.7%) and non-serious (50.8%) adverse effects. There was also a high discontinuation rate, with half the patients staying on the assigned drug for less than 6 months. "The use of AAPs in older psychotic patients presents a major clinical dilemma", the researchers said, adding that psychotic disorders had severe adverse consequences for the health and quality of life of sufferers. With no safe and effective treatment alternatives, the authors did not suggest that AAPs be withheld from older patients, but recommended that AAPs should be given in low doses for short durations, and side effects closely monitored.

J Clin Psychiatry 2012; 27 November (online)
doi: 10.4088/JCP.11m07164



ADHD medication cuts risk of criminality

Patients with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are less likely to be convicted of a crime when taking ADHD medication than during periods of non-medication, according to a study of more than 25 000 Swedish patients with ADHD. The research found a 32% reduction in the criminality rate among men who were taking ADHD medication when compared with non-medication periods (hazard ratio, 0.68; 95% CI, 0.63–0.73) and a 41% reduction for women (hazard ratio, 0.59; 95% CI, 0.50–0.70). Although ADHD symptoms often persisted into adulthood, it was common for patients to discontinue medication in adolescence and early adulthood. Any beneficial effects of ADHD medication had to be weighed against potential adverse effects, including overprescription and side effects.

N Engl J Med 2012; 22 November (online)
doi: 10.1056/NEJMoal203241

Physicians in dark on dietary supplement use

Almost four in 10 adult Americans have taken a dietary supplement in the past 2 years, but many do not tell their doctors about their use of supplements, according to a research survey. The most common reason for taking dietary supplements was to "to feel better" (41%), but supplements were also used for potentially more serious health conditions, such as "to treat digestive issues" (28.4%), "to lower cholesterol" (20.6%) and "to lower high blood pressure" (15.7%). More than a third (35.9%) of supplement users had not told their doctors about their use of supplements.

Arch Intern Med 2012; 19 November (online)
doi: 10.1001/2013.jamainternmed.311

No long-term survival advantage with endovascular AAA repair

Endovascular repair of abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) shows similar long-term survival rates to open repair, despite hopes that the less invasive procedure would reduce mortality and be a better alternative for older patients. A randomised trial of 881 patients with asymptomatic AAAs found the perioperative survival advantage with endovascular repair was lost after several years, and aneurysm rupture after repair occurred only in the endovascular repair group. Endovascular repair improved survival among patients younger than 70 years, but among older patients it tended to reduce survival. An accompanying editorial said while the dream of improving long-term survival and expanding the population that would benefit from AAA repair was seemingly over, the better postoperative recovery for patients with endovascular repair was a step forward.

N Engl J Med 2012; 22 November (online)
doi: 10.1056/NEJMoal207481

From the MJA archives

MJA 1985; 16 September (edited extract)

The pain of pleasure

Music may have charms to soothe, but it also has the ability to give musicians a pain in the neck — and other parts of the anatomy. These include: fiddler's neck (a skin rash under the chin rest); male violinist's cysts from ingrown whiskers; flautist's neck; bassoonist's left index finger; violinist's jaw displacement; horn player's palsy; cymbal player's shoulder; tuba lips; guitar nipples; harpist's cramp; cellist's scrotum (dermatitis from constant rubbing); English horn player's thumb;

bass violinist's cut finger, hangnail or haemorrhoids; bagpiper's fungus; allergies to mouthpieces of wind instruments; breathing problems; dental problems for horn and wind players; paraesthesia; carpal tunnel syndrome; hearing loss ... the list goes on. Doctors appear finally to be giving musicians the attention they long ago started giving to soccer and tennis players.

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