

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

Transfusion transmitted diseases have been of major interest during the past decade. First we worried about HIV, then HTLV and hepatitis C and finally variant CJD. However, I think we may well be in for a change of diet in this first decade of the new century. I have recently heard on the grapevine that two "Blood Substitutes" are due to be licensed in the first quarter of 2001. One is a haemoglobin solution and the other a perflourochemical. I will keep you updated and, in the meantime, welcome to this, my 24th newsletter.

Cured Meat and Toxoplasmosis in Pregnancy

Infection with *Toxoplasma gondii* is one of the commonest parasitic diseases in the world. If acquired during pregnancy the parasite can cause foetal blindness and brain damage. It has always been taught that the main source of the disease was infected cats. However, a recent collaborative study in six large European cities studied acute infection with *T.gondii* in pregnant women. They found that the principal risk factor, accounting for between 30% and 63% of infections depending on site, was eating undercooked or cured meat products. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2000;**321**:127-8 & 142-7)

Is Milk Still Cool?

A recent survey has shown that American adolescents are drinking more soft drinks than ever before. Whilst this is good news for the manufacturers, doctors are worried because, as a result, the youngsters are drinking less milk and fruit juice. This may well lead to a lowering of peak bone mass, especially in girls, with a subsequent increase in the risk of osteoporosis. (*Arch.Dis.Child.* 2000;**83**:18-24)

Farewell Siesta

When you wake in the morning there is a sudden surge in both your blood pressure and heart rate. This, in turn, puts a strain on the heart. Recent research from Costa Rica has shown that taking an afternoon nap is no better. They found a definite association between taking a siesta and having a myocardial infarction. Lack of physical exercise associated with afternoon snoozing may also be a contributory factor. (*Int.J.Epidemiol.* 2000;**29**:429-37)

Malaria Prevention

An old colleague of mine has written an excellent review on the effectiveness of the various measures that travellers may take to avoid catching malaria. This is a "must" for anyone who travels to the tropics or is responsible for staff, who go to such places. He divides the interventions into four groups, "Beneficial", "Likely to be beneficial", "Unknown effectiveness" and "Likely to be ineffective or harmful". There are one or two surprising results. The only "Beneficial" item is insecticide treated mosquito nets. Many of the current drug prophylactic regimens, such as chloroquine plus proguanil, atovaquone plus proguanil and pyrimethamine plus dapsone, are amongst the "Unknown effectiveness" group as are aerosol insecticides. Insect repellents containing diethyltoluamide or doxycycline are "Likely to be harmful" in children. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2000;**321**:154-60)

Prevention of Acute Mountain Sickness

A recent review of randomised trials for the prevention of acute mountain sickness produced the following results. When going to altitudes in excess of 4,000 metres, at an ascent rate > 500 metres per day, dexamethasone 8 – 16 mg or acetazolamide 750mg should be considered for prophylaxis. Acetazolamide 500mg, although a widely used regimen, is inadequate. When the rate of ascent is < 500 metres per day, prophylaxis is not worth while. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:267-72)

Couch Potatoes

The best way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more. If you can not face doing both, which of the two alternatives should you choose? In a randomised trial, obese men who ran off 700kcal (2926kJ) a day lost 1.3kg more than those who restricted their dietary intake by 700kcal did. In addition the exercise group got fitter. (*Ann.Int.Med.* 2000;**133**:92-103)

Traffic Woes

Male drivers in congested traffic have yet another problem to face. A French study suggests that driving, especially when being repeatedly stationary, may raise the testicular temperature by as much as 2.2⁰C, with a consequent reduction in fertility. This may partly explain why the wives of HGV drivers take longer than normal to conceive. (*Human Reproduction*. 2000;**15**:1355)

***C pneumoniae* and Heart Disease**

A number of small studies have suggested that chronic infection with *Chlamydia pneumoniae* could be a cause of heart disease. Two large prospective studies have recently been reported, which, when combined with 13 previous studies, show no significant correlation between *C pneumoniae* infection and a raised risk of heart disease. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:204-13)

Rapid Malaria Diagnosis Test

160 consecutive patients aged 9 – 77 years who presented to Northwick Park Hospital with a history of fever and travel within the past year to a malarious area, were screened using conventional blood films and a simple diagnostic test strip (*ParaSight F*). Although the test was not 100% sensitive, it was considered extremely useful as a rapid diagnostic tool. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:484-5)

HIV Update

According to a report published at the beginning of July by UNAIDS, one fifth of adults in South Africa are infected with HIV. Unicef's flagship report, *Progress of Nations*, which is available at www.unicef.org.uk, states that almost a third of HIV infected people are between the ages of 15 and 24. Every minute six people under the age of 24 become infected with HIV with females being 50% more likely to contract HIV than males. In a recent trial sponsored by the National Institutes for Health, and reported in *JAMA*, it was shown that the addition of interleukin 2 to the anti-retroviral drug regimen both increases the CD4 Tcell count and decreases the viral load. (*JAMA*. 2000;**284**:183-9)

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