

MINERVA

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Scientists in Bristol claim they have cracked the climate change problem. The solution, they say, is simply to stop breathing, or at least breathe less. If the average person takes 24 000 breaths a day, breathing in about 6 g of carbon dioxide and breathing out around 800 g, then exhaling over the course of a year adds a net 290 kg of CO₂ to the atmosphere. Merely by cutting one breath in three, we could decrease the CO₂ load annually by 0.63 gigatonnes. This would of course be easier if everyone sat around doing very little (*Null Hypothesis: the Journal of Unlikely Science* 2007 www.null-hypothesis.co.uk/science/strange-but-true/profs-probings/carbon_virgin_earth_climate_breathing).

Brushing your teeth is considered a fairly innocent activity, but in some people it can prove quite dangerous. Three patients with tooth brushing induced epilepsy are described in *Neurology* (2007;68:769-71). All three had small circumscribed structural lesions in the primary somatosensory cortex in close proximity to the hand and speech motor areas.

To investigate the effect of delaying clamping of the umbilical cord in preterm infants, 39 preterm infants were randomly assigned to an intervention group or control group. The intervention involved giving newly delivered mothers oxytocin, while placing the infant 15 cm below the placenta and delaying cord clamping by 60-90 seconds. Babies in the control group were delivered conventionally. Near infrared spectroscopy confirmed that delayed umbilical cord clamping improves cerebral oxygenation during the first 24 hours in preterm babies (*Pediatrics* 2007;119:55-9).

Three hundred and seventy applications to medical schools started with the phrase “a fascination for how the human body works,”



A 31 year old woman who had taken oxytetracycline for three months to treat rosacea attended clinic because of painful finger nails, which had partially lifted off the nail bed and turned yellow. She had noticed this while on holiday in Turkey three weeks earlier. On examination she had onycholysis of all fingernails and toenails, and a yellow discoloration of all nails. Photo-onycholysis is a well documented side effect of tetracyclines within the photosensitivity spectrum. Treatment was stopped and her nails are now returning to normal.

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which could be put down to a lack of originality. But when 234 included an anecdote about “burning a hole in my pyjamas at age 8” when asked to describe a dramatic event, a petty form of plagiarism has to be suspected. Nearly 800 medical applications had personal statements that included phrases from three examples on the internet. The survey was carried out by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (*Metro* 8 March 2007, p 11 www.metro.co.uk).

General practitioners are encouraged to use two screening questions to identify patients with depression, but what is the evidence that these “ultrashort” screening instruments work? A meta-analysis of 22 studies in the *British Journal of General Practice* (2007;57:144-51 www.rcgp.org.uk/journal/_/bjgp.aspx) found that a one question test is unacceptable as it identifies just three of every 10 patients with depression. Two or three question tests perform better, identifying eight of 10 cases. But two question screening produces a high false positive rate, so ultrashort tests should be a way of ruling out a diagnosis, rather than making one.

The premature appearance of secondary sexual characteristics in young children is more common in African American children than white children, and the use of personal care products that contain hormones is more common in African Americans of all ages than in white people. These observations suggest that the use of oestrogen and other hormone-containing personal care products in young African American women may account, in part, for their increased risk of breast cancer before the menopause. Public disclosure by manufacturers is essential for this line of enquiry to move forward (*Medical Hypotheses* 2007;68:756-66).

Most sexual health programmes inadvertently give the impression that safer sex and pleasurable sex are mutually exclusive. But evidence suggests that promoting pleasure alongside safer sex can increase the consistent use of condoms and other kinds of safer sex. The more successful methods include promoting sexual techniques and dialogue about sex, teaching couples how to have better sex, and using images of desire in sex education material (*Reproductive Health Matters* 2006;14:23-31).