MINERVA

Intensive smoking cessation programmes that are administered free to patients over three months are cost effective in high risk smokers with heart disease. Compared with those receiving “usual” care of counselling and printed material given out before discharge from hospital, those who received the intensive intervention had significantly higher continuous abstinence rates at each follow-up interval. At two years, 33% had managed to kick the habit and stay clean, compared with just 9% in the usual care group. The absolute risk reduction in mortality was 9.2% with a number needed to treat of 11 (*Chest* 2007;131:446-52).

Recent studies indicate that the risk of stillbirth increases after a caesarean section. In an attempt to shed more light on these findings, a retrospective cohort study was conducted in an English population of women with a previous delivery by caesarean section between 1968 and 1989. This has confirmed the risk of stillbirth as 4.6 per 1000. Why this happens remains unclear, but, as the rate of caesarean deliveries is soaring, it's likely that the risk is now much higher (*BJOG* 2007 Jan 25 doi: 10.1111/j.1471-0528.2006.01249.x).

There are now more obese people living on our planet than there are people who are starving, according to *RTD info*, a magazine on European research (December 2006;51:29). Currently at least 7% of health spending in the European Union is allocated to obesity and its medical consequences, a figure that doesn't reflect the loss of economic activity attributable to this evolution. And hot on the heels of this epidemic comes another—“diabesity”: 80% of people with adult onset diabetes are typically overweight.

Drinking spearmint tea could reduce mild hirsutism in women. Previous reports have suggested that extracts of the spearmint plant could lower male libido, probably by reducing levels of androgens (studies in rats have confirmed this effect). Now, a small study of 21 hirsute women has found that drinking two cups of spearmint tea a day for five days significantly reduced their androgen levels, suggesting that this might become a more palatable alternative to hormone treatment to suppress androgen production (*Phytotherapy Research* 2007 doi: 10.1002/ptr.2074).

Another sort of tea may be just the ticket to dampen down the detrimental effects of toxic

A 69 year old woman presented with reduced visual acuity and central visual distortion caused by a unilateral idiopathic macular hole. The condition affects three in every 1000 people, with 13% eventually being affected bilaterally, and it most commonly affects women older than 50 years. The retinal hole at the central fovea causes reduced visual acuity and distortion so that objects seem pinched in the middle. Successful surgical closure rates should be around 80%, improving visual distortion, and with 45% achieving a visual acuity of 6/12 or better. Our patient—the artist Jacqueline Bialeska—created this dramatic watercolour comparing her visual experience with her unaffected eye and affected eye.

Edward Doyle, vitreoretinal fellow, Michael Eckstein, consultant, Sussex Eye Hospital, Eastern Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 5BF EdRachie@btinternet.com

chemotherapy on the small bowel. Irinotecan is highly effective against many cancers but causes severe inflammatory damage and oxidative stress to the mucosa of the small intestine. Green tea polyphenols administered orally to mice already treated with irinotecan protected against oxidation, and these findings may be replicated in the clinical setting (*Journal of Nutrition* 2007;137:634-40).

Intensive statin therapy in elderly men and women with coronary artery disease provides long term protection against acute cardiac events and death as well as reducing cholesterol levels, compared with moderate doses of statins. However, the SAGE study, which compared moderate pravastatin therapy with intensive atorvastatin treatment, found that both reduced myocardial ischaemia to a similar extent. The authors say this points to there being different low density lipoprotein cholesterol-lowering thresholds for ischaemia and for major acute cardiac events (*Circulation* 2007;115:700-7).

Hopping rabbits are helping to test a new tissue-engineered device designed to improve healing of the anterior cruciate ligaments. The device is a biodegradable, polyester based scaffold strengthened by braiding, similar to shoelaces. The rabbits showed that it has high mechanical durability and improved ligament healing, especially when the polymer was seeded with ligament cells to encourage the growth of fresh tissue (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2007 Feb 20-23 www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0608837104).

Black henna tattoos are popular with holidaymakers, but they can also cause sensitisation to the paraphenylenediamine in hair dye, causing allergic contact dermatitis. A series of cases in the *CMAJ* (2007;176:445-6) all describe similar stories of young people developing erythema, oedema, and pruritis of their scalp, hairline, eyelids, or cheeks a couple of days after having their hair dyed. All of them had had at least one black henna tattoo.