

Why exercise can't make you thin

While studying the physical activity patterns of the Hadza people of northern Tanzania, Herman Pontzer discovered that despite walking, running and heavy farm work, the average Hadza burns no more calories in a day than the average American. In fact, a slew of research now shows that our bodies adapt our calorie expenditure in a narrow range. It's what we eat and how much of it that is the problem. But don't bin the running shoes or cancel your gym membership - exercise remains vital to well-being, but not much to weight-loss. *Daily Telegraph*, 21 February 2021, bit.ly/2ZBY2eD

Exercise can be a pain - in the knee

Many middle-aged runners get regularly told we'll destroy our knees in old age unless we stop our 5k-a-day vice. New research suggests that while using weight training to strengthen limb joints may not work to improve joint pain [*New York Times*, 19 February 2021, nyti.ms/2NuMG9x], other research suggests that even those with existing injuries will see them improve if they take up running - even marathons! Time to dust of the trainers... *BMJ* 16 October 2019, dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2019-000586

Precision medicine comes one step closer

The Cancer Dependency Map (DepMap) project has begun a comprehensive mapping of around 500 individual cancers. The aim is to identify drug sensitivities and explore the use of CRISPR-CAS9 in cutting out genes responsible for the unregulated growth of cancer cells. The advent of effective mRNA vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 also promises individualised vaccines against specific cancers in the long-run. Exciting stuff, but will those in middle and low-income countries see any benefit, even in the long-term? *The Economist*, 13 February 2021, econ.st/3qVheA5

Power naps save lives

Winston Churchill swore by them, Boris Johnson regularly takes one as part of his routine, and Michelle Obama was a great advocate. A 10-20 minute 'power nap' in the early afternoon seems to boost productivity, reduce coronary heart disease and improve your sleep at night. Provided, of course, that your work routine allows time for this! *The Times*, 20 January 2021, bit.ly/3uoV9M7

How do face masks protect us from coronavirus?

Until recently, the generally agreed consensus has been that triple layer facemasks keep us from inhaling viral particles in aerosols. It turns out that it has more to do with snot! Apparently, the increased humidity in the upper respiratory tract caused by wearing a face mask keeps the mucus fluid (especially in cold weather), increasing its protective properties against airborne virus particles. So, a runny nose is a good thing, at least when it comes to COVID-19! *The Economist*, 6 March 2021, econ.st/3ec7hdP

Zoom fatigue? Try Botox...

Yes, you heard it here. Many men are finding the stress of lockdown is making them look older and more haggard on the ubiquitous video conferencing calls that have replaced our previous work and social life encounters. So worried are we, apparently, that there has been a 70 per cent increase in men seeking video consultations for plastic surgery in the last year - everything from dermal filler for 'jawline definition', chin enhancement and Botox to eliminate wrinkles. I personally prefer to use a Zoom cat filter - it is cheaper, less painful and gives everyone a quick laugh! *The Times*, 5 March 2021, bit.ly/38djbQJ

Telemedicine benefits the environment

According to research by Newcastle Hospitals NHS Trust, switching to virtual outpatient appointments over telephone or Zoom has reduced the carbon emissions from their patients travelling to hospital by 160 tonnes. Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust estimates its patients travelled two million fewer miles in the last year. Proving that remote appointments have time and environmental benefits without detracting from patient care in most instances has led NHS England to announce that it plans to reduce in-person outpatient appointments by 30 million next year. While there is no denying the benefits of telemedicine, one wonders how much the reduced interpersonal contact will have on patient care and recovery in the long-term? *BBC News Online*, 6 March 2021, bbc.in/3rn0aTN

'Skin hunger' and mental health

It is said that Aristotle regarded touch as the basest, most animal sense. Notwithstanding the fact skin constitutes 20 per cent of our body by mass and is the largest single organ, with in the region of 50 nerve endings per square centimetre, the skin is also our largest sense organ. As David Cranston's article in this edition points out, loss of touch or 'skin hunger' may be one of the most significant sensory deprivations of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also being recognised as one of the major contributors to the current rise in mental health problems. We may find British reserve needs to go out the window when the day comes that we can once again 'greet each other with a holy kiss' (Romans 16:16). *The Guardian*, 28 February 2021, bit.ly.co/5s6N

Simple skin swab to test for Parkinson's disease

Talking of skin, recent research has shown that a simple skin swab can pick up tell-tale compounds in sebum that indicate the early onset of Parkinson's disease. Early studies show this test is 80 per cent accurate, and if further trials are successful, it could speed diagnosis and early detection of the disease for tens of thousands each year. This discovery started with a retired nurse noticing a change in her husband's scent years before his diagnosis. She could spot the same odour in 100 per cent of cases in blinded tests. *BBC News*, 11 March 2021, bit.ly.co/5wWz