



Identifying risk factors for lactation difficulties

- **The Issue:** Poor lactation can occur even with mothers who are highly motivated to breast-feed their newborns. Difficulty lactating during the first week following labour has been found to be highly linked with early termination of breast-feeding. Thus, researchers have looked for risk factors contributing to lactation difficulties in order to lower the incidence of early termination of breast-feeding.
- **The Study:** Two hundred and eighty mothers, who were highly motivated to breast-feed, were monitored right after giving birth, as were their babies.
- **The Results:** Three days following labour, delayed lactation was observed among 22% of mothers. One significant association was with primiparous mothers. Among the primiparous group, lactation difficulties were closely related to birth weights > 3,600 g. Also linked significantly with delayed lactation were maternal body mass index > 27, second-stage labour exceeding one hour, and having flat or inverted nipples. Infants whose mothers experienced lactation difficulties were seven times more likely to undergo excessive weight loss (> 10% of birth weight). All mothers who are at increased risk should be monitored to continue breast-feeding.

Dewey KG, Nommsen-Rivers LA, Heinig MJ, et al: Risk factors for suboptimal infant breastfeeding behaviour, delayed onset of lactation, and excess neonatal weight loss. *Pediatrics* 2003; 112(3 Pt 1):607-19.

Whispered voice test vs. audiometry

- **The Issue:** Hearing impairment is common among the elderly, and should be detected in children as early as possible. The whispered voice test is just one simple way to determine whether someone is hearing impaired, but is it accurate?
- **The Study:** One version of the whispered voice test involves the practitioner, who is seated behind the patient at arm's length. The patient must repeat the combination of letters and numbers whispered by the practitioner with one ear masked at a time. Australian researchers conducted eight studies among four adults and four children to compare the whispered voice test with audiometry.
- **The Result:** Although the whispered voice test is extremely variable because it greatly depends on the human voice, it proved to be very accurate in specificity, as well as in sensitivity compared to audiometry. In adults, sensitivity ranged from 90% to 100%, while it ranged from 80% to 96% in children. Specificity ranged from 80% to 87% in adults, and 90% to 98% in children.

Pirozzo S, Papinczak T, Glasziou P: Whispered voice test for screening for hearing impairment in adults and children: Systematic review. *BMJ* 2003; 327(7421):967.

More options for breast cancer

- **The Issue:** Much of the recent decrease in breast cancer mortality has been attributed to tamoxifen therapy. However, aromatase inhibitors have emerged as promising agents for the treatment of post-menopausal breast cancer.
- **The Study:** In the current randomized study, researchers compared letrozole (2.5 mg/day) with placebo in 5,157 post-menopausal women who had completed approximately five years of tamoxifen therapy for primary breast cancer. Five years of followup had been planned, but the study was stopped at 2.4 years due to promising results.
- **The Results:** The estimated four-year disease-free survival rate was significantly higher with letrozole than with placebo, whereas the estimated four-year overall survival rate did not differ significantly between the groups. Letrozole was associated with significantly greater incidences of hot flashes, arthritis, and myalgia, with a trend toward greater incidence of osteoporosis. Because the study was stopped early, the duration of therapy and long-term safety were not addressed. Nevertheless, aromatase inhibitor therapy should be considered in post-menopausal women with hormone-receptor-positive breast cancer, although concerns about osteoporosis merit further study.

Goss PE, Ingle JN, Martino S, et al: A randomized trial of letrozole in post-menopausal women after five years of tamoxifen therapy for early-stage breast cancer. *N Engl J Med* 2003; 349(19):1793-802.

BPH: Is combination therapy the answer?

- **The Issue:** There are two commonly prescribed drug classes for treating symptomatic, benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). To assess the effectiveness of combination therapy with these two drug classes, researchers conducted a double-blind, randomized trial.
- **The Study:** The trial included 3,047 men with at least moderately symptomatic BPH. These men received the alpha-blocker doxazosin, the 5-alpha-reductase inhibitor finasteride, both drugs, or double placebo.
- **The Results:** The primary end point was a composite of increased symptoms, acute urinary retention, renal insufficiency, recurrent urinary infection, or incontinence. The four-year incidence of progression was 17% with placebo, 10% with each monotherapy, and 5% with combination therapy. Differences between combination therapy and monotherapies, and between monotherapies and placebo, were highly significant. In this trial, both finasteride and doxazosin delayed the progression of symptomatic BPH. However, combination therapy given for several years was more effective than either drug alone.

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McConnell JD, Roehrborn CG, Bautista OM, et al: The long-term effect of doxazosin, finasteride, and combination therapy on the clinical progression of benign prostatic hyperplasia. *N Engl J Med* 2003; 349(25):2387-98.