

What is already known on this topic

Clinical practice guidelines state that recovery from acute low back pain is rapid and complete

What this study adds

People with acute back pain experience improvements in pain, disability, and return to work within one month

Further but smaller improvements occur up to three months, after which pain and disability levels remain almost constant

Low levels of pain and disability persist from three to at least 12 months

Most people will have at least one recurrence within 12 months

working.⁹ Thus it may be sensible to consider separately the prognosis of those off work. It remains unclear if the prognosis of participants initially off work is worse than for those who are not.

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Corrections and clarifications

Outcomes of screening to prevent cancer: analysis of cumulative incidence of cervical abnormality and modelling of cases and deaths prevented

Three errors appeared in this paper by A E Raffle and colleagues (26 April, 901-4). After proof stage, we inadvertently changed the word "thousand" to the number "100" in the title of table 1. The title should read: "Numbers and rates of women with abnormal cytology and abnormal histology per 1000 women tested since 1976 for those screened in 1991-6." We also incorrectly transferred to the abridged version a change made by the authors at proof stage: in the section "Combined consequences, benefits, and harms" the number of tests involved in screening 1000 women for 35 years should have been reported as 7700 [not 7777]. An error in the section "Progression rates" persisted through all stages to publication: "56 of the estimated 80 cancers per thousand" should have read "56 of the estimated 80 cancers per 10 000."

Age related macular degeneration: Smoking entails major risk of blindness

We slipped up on a couple of points in this letter by Simon P Kelly and colleagues (28 June, pp 1458-9). Firstly, during the editing process a rogue "C" got inserted before "Simon." Secondly, we misinterpreted a sentence in their letter. In the third paragraph, the final sentence should read: "Because of this, smoking was estimated to cause or contribute to up to 20% of blindness in people aged over 50." We had wrongly attributed this statement to Chodpar et al's study, instead of the Australian Blue Mountains eye study.

Socioeconomic and ethnic group differences in self reported health status and use of health services by children and young people in England: cross sectional study

Sonia Saxena and colleagues would like to clarify how the data were collected for their study, as editing may have resulted in readers thinking that the authors were responsible for the data collection (*BMJ* 2002;325:520-3). The health survey for England was in fact conducted by the Joint Health Surveys Unit at University College London and the National Centre for Social Research. The authors used data supplied by the Essex data archive for their analysis. The first part of reference 11 was also incorrect; the full reference should read: Office for National Statistics. *Health survey for England: the health of minority ethnic groups '99*. London: Stationery Office, 1999.

One hundred years ago

Whisky

It is a matter of common observation that during the last few decades the use of whisky as a beverage in place of beer and wine has increased enormously in England, and that among the British in India it has to a great extent replaced brandy, which used to be foundation of most pegs. We do not at present propose to inquire how this change has been brought about, nor to attempt to estimate the degree of the responsibility which should be accepted by the medical profession in the change, but it will be

admitted that the change of habit cannot be without practical interest to medical men who are often invited to approve the use of whisky as a less harmful alcoholic beverage than others formerly in more general use. This change in habit has been accompanied by a change in the mode of manufacture of the spirit sold as whisky so considerable, that whereas years ago 70 per cent. was malt whisky and 30 per cent. grain or patent spirit, now the proportions are reversed. (*BMJ* 1903;iii:1645)