

What is already known on this topic

Psychological stress has been implicated as a determinant of disease activity in multiple sclerosis

Evidence on the relation between stressful events and exacerbations of multiple sclerosis is lacking

A recent report of the American Academy of Neurology emphasised the need to obtain tightly defined prospective data

What this study adds

Patients with multiple sclerosis who experience a stressful event are subsequently at increased risk of an exacerbation of their disease

Stress and infection are independently associated with the risk of an exacerbation

Stress and infection and the risk of an exacerbation

Certain types of psychological stress can suppress immune reactions, leading to an increased susceptibility to infections.²³ This would confound the positive association we found between stress and exacerbations. However, we found no evidence of an increase in infections after stressful events in this study. Stress and infection were independently associated with the risk of exacerbation. It will not be easy to tackle these factors in individual patients, because infections and stressful events cannot simply be eradicated from patients' lives. The knowledge that stressful events are associated with disease activity adds important information to the limited insight that patients and their caregivers have on this unpredictable disease.

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Corrections and clarifications

Sexual function problems and help seeking behaviour in Britain: national probability sample study

We inadvertently omitted from the main text (but not from the table) one of the main findings of this study by Catherine Mercer and colleagues (23 August, pp 426-7). We should have mentioned that the most common problem among women, as among men, was a lack of interest in sex. Also, in the final sentence of the penultimate paragraph, a misplaced word ("often") changed the sense: the sentence should have said that people who seek help for their sexual function problems often consult their general practitioner.

Wrong heading on BMJ cover

We misrepresented on the cover of the issue of 2 August the paper by Michael J Radcliffe and colleagues (Enzyme potentiated desensitisation in treatment of seasonal allergic rhinitis: double blind randomised controlled study. *BMJ* 2003;327:251-4). Our heading suggested that desensitisation (of any type) for allergies does not work, whereas the paper by Radcliffe and colleagues referred specifically to enzyme potentiated desensitisation. Traditional desensitisation does in fact work for certain indications (for example, bee and wasp venom anaphylaxis; severe simple, grass pollen hay fever; and severe cat allergy). Unfortunately, we repeated our error in the first sentence of the summary in "This Week in the BMJ."

National survey of use of hospital beds by adolescents aged 12 to 19 in the United Kingdom

An error in the figure in this paper by R M Viner has recently been brought to our attention—a couple of years after publication (*BMJ* 2001; 322:957-8). The legend within the graph should indicate that the top two curves relate to male inpatients (blue) and female inpatients (red) and that the bottom two relate to male and female day case patients (green and orange respectively).

"Terminal sedation" different from euthanasia, Dutch ministers agree

In this news article by Tony Sheldon, we attributed the wrong sex to the Dutch health minister (30 August, p 465). Clémence Ross is in fact a woman.