VACCINE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Decades of vaccine scepticism predicted on a deep human fear of injectable toxins means that people expect a reaction from vaccines. What better way to survey the rate and scope of these than looking at the placebo arm of the COVID-19 jab trials? A systematic review and meta-analysis of 12 articles (45,380 participants) showed that 35% of people receiving their first placebo jab experienced a serious adverse event (32% with the second dose). The most commonly reported problems in the placebo groups were headache (19% first dose, 16% second) and fatigue (first dose: 17%, 15% second). There were more reactions in the genuine vaccine arm—but allowing for such a hefty nocebo response this accounts for 76% of all adverse events from the first jab (52% of the second).


MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS, SINGLE CAUSE?

Bad luck if you were doing research into the causes of MS, it has all been completed now. Hand your P45s in and pack your bags. Do not let A Fo Ben’s tongue in cheek comment detract from a blockbuster clinical research paper on a 20-year cohort of US military recruits, 10 million in all (955 of whom developed MS). Their risk of developing MS was 32-fold higher after Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) infection, but not following other viruses, including CMV. Serum levels of neurofilament light chain increased only after EBV seroconversion. The strength of this association means a confounder would need to have a greater than 60-fold risk of causing MS, a greater than 60-fold risk of EBV seroconversion. When do we start vaccination against MS? And then we can redeploys the MS doctors?

Science. 2022;375 (6578):296–301.

CAT NIP PREVENTS BUGS THAT NIP

Have you ever wondered why cats are so attracted to catnip? They rub their faces and heads against catnip (Nepeta cataria) and silver vine (Actinidia polygama) and then roll about on the floor. Authors (who I have to admit are much more curious about this than I have ever been) have been rewarded with a surprising answer. They identified iridoid nepetalactol is the major component of silver vine that elicits this potent response which increases plasma β-endorphin levels. The rubbing behaviour transfers nepetalactol onto feline faces and heads where it repels the mosquito, Aedes albopictus. The authors suggest that this attraction and behavioural response is a neurophysiological chemical pest defence that protects dear moggy from mosquito bites.