Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
**HRT after oophorectomy**

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after prophylactic oophorectomy is safe for women with *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* mutations, according to a study in *J Clin Oncol* (published online Feb 23, DOI:10.1200/JCO.2004.06.090). A mathematical model based on epidemiological data showed that surgical removal of the ovaries significantly increased life expectancy in women with the mutations, and that short-term HRT—used to treat the side-effects of oophorectomy-induced menopause—did not significantly affect the gain in life expectancy, if treatment was stopped before age 50 years.

**Anti-epilepsy drug for migraine**

An anti-epileptic drug could help to prevent migraine attacks and reduce the use of medication for headaches, according to a study in *JAMA* (2004; 291: 965–73). Researchers assessed the efficacy and safety of topiramate in a trial of nearly 500 patients with migraines during a 26-week study. The frequency of migraines fell significantly in patients who received topiramate, and patients were also able to reduce their use of rescue medication for headaches, such as aspirin, acetaminophen, triptans, and opioids.

**FDA chief to head Medicare**

US President George Bush has nominated Mark McClellan, the head of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to run healthcare agency Medicare. Although Senate confirmation is required, a senior senate aide said they anticipated no problem because “people like him on both sides of the [political] aisle and many lawmakers foresee a fairly quick confirmation”. McClellan would supervise implementation of a new law to expand Medicare to include prescription drug benefits for senior citizens. Although the FDA chief is popular with pharmaceutical companies for reducing manufacturing costs, consumer groups have accused him of being too pro-industry.

**Insulin for heart attack?**

Incorporating insulin into the regimen of anticoagulation drugs given to patients after a heart attack could significantly reduce inflammation and improve survival, according to a report in *Circulation* (2004; 109: 849–54). In tests done up to 48 h after the attack, insulin reduced concentrations of C-reactive protein and serum amyloid A (indicators of inflammation) by 40% and 50%, respectively. Lead researcher Paresh Dandona said that “infusing insulin at low doses along with antithrombic agents reduces the amount of increase in inflammation and rapidly suppresses the increase of factors that interfere with clot-dissolving medication”.

**Interferon might stop SARS**

A drug used to treat hepatatis C protected primates from severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) according to researchers in *Nat Med* (2004; DOI: 10.1038/nm1001). Treating macaques with interferon before SARS infection decreased the viral load and severity of lung damage. The virus shed from the monkeys’ throats also fell, which could reduce transmission. To a lesser extent, the drug also protected monkeys who had already been exposed to the virus. The investigators suggest that health-care workers and others exposed to SARS could benefit from the drug, and they propose clinical trials to test this.

**Gut diseases and schizophrenia**

Patients with a history of coeliac disease could be at an increased risk for schizophrenia according to findings in the *BMJ* (2004; 328: 438–39). The investigators did a population-based case-control study in Denmark and revised the history of almost 8000 schizophrenic patients with nearly 200 000 matched controls. The results lend support to epidemiological and genetic evidence for a link between the two diseases. Patients with a history of ulcerative colitis were 40% more likely to have schizophrenia than were controls, and a gluten-free diet seemed to improve symptoms of schizophrenia.

**Nerve transplant for deafness**

Researchers are exploring a novel approach to restore hearing function of the inner ear in deaf people, according to findings presented at a meeting of the Association of Research in Otolaryngology (Feb 22–26, Daytona Beach, Florida, USA). Investigators showed that fetal nervous tissue survived very well when transplanted into the cochleas of adult rats. Although structural and functional integration of the implanted cells with the host auditory cells was not seen, the behaviour of the implanted cells suggested that they did have the potential to integrate and replace the auditory nerve, said the researchers.

**Asthma, COPD, and hormones**

Postmenopausal women who use hormone-replacement therapy have an increased risk of developing asthma, but not chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), according to an article in *Arch Intern Med* (2004; 164: 379–86). Researchers used data from the Nurse’s Health Study, which enrolled 121 700 female nurses aged 30–55 years old. Women who used oestrogen alone had a risk of asthma almost three times higher than that of women who never used hormones. Women who used oestrogen plus progestagen had a similarly increased rate of newly diagnosed asthma. However, the rates of newly diagnosed COPD among hormone users and non-hormone users were similar.