

Why children are scared of the dark

A child who is afraid of the dark **may not be** seeking attention - as many parents would suspect - but rather suffering **from** night blindness.

Researchers say the condition is rare, and the **diagnosis** can often be missed.

Most people's eyes adjust to the dark after a short period of time.

But some children, who have no obvious visual problems and who can see normally in **well-lit** conditions, can have difficulty seeing in the dark even after this period of adaptation.

Fear of shadows

Writing **in** the British Medical Journal, researchers from the Gartnavel General Hospital, Glasgow, detail two cases of a form of the condition congenital stationary night blindness.

A three-year-old girl was **brought** to doctors by her parents who said she persistently complained **about not being** able to see in the dark.

She had great difficulty getting to sleep, and would not leave her **bedroom** in the dark, **although** she would move from a dark bedroom to a lit hallway.

She was only taken to see doctors after her three-month-old sister was diagnosed as having **sight** problems.

The second case concerned a girl of two who had a history of falling over and bumping into things, **as well as** problems seeing in the dark.

She would wake crying in the night, but would not go to her parents' bedroom and was very frightened. She was also **afraid** of shadows

Doctors discovered there was a **family history** of visual problems, **including** night blindness.

The child was given **a torch** she could carry outside at night, and she had a bright light shining into her bedroom.

Her fear of the dark appears to have disappeared.

The research team, **led** by consultant ophthalmologist Gordon Dutton, said it was important to get as many details as possible where children are afraid of the dark, particularly if there is a family history of visual problems.

They wrote: "Night blindness in children can bring **about** profound fear of the dark.

"Recognition of the diagnosis and the simple expedient of giving the child control of lighting conditions can change family life."

Women leaving jobs in information technology

Making sure women stay in **technology jobs** is as important as persuading girls to pursue such careers in the first place.

This was **the view** of a succession of speakers at the third annual Women in Information Technology conference **held** in London on Wednesday.

Currently too many women are leaving the profession and this flow must be **stemmed** if the UK is to have an equal percentage of men and women in the tech sector, said Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt.

They are quitting their jobs, **either to have children or** to pursue other interests, she said.

"Over one third of new recruits in the technology industry are women but they don't stay so something is going wrong on the issue of retention," she said.

Part of the problem, said Ms Hewitt, is a perception that it was impossible to balance a career and children in the often tough world of technology.

Despite much work at government and industry level to address the problem of **recruiting** and retaining females in technology jobs, the figures **still** make for depressing reading.

Speakers from **high-profile** tech firms such as Oracle, Cisco and Dell admitted that **less than** 20% of their managers are women.

The average starting salary for a female technology graduate is £3,000 less than her male counterpart and **only** one third of new recruits are women.

GM cheese from cow clones

Scientists in New Zealand have created the world's first cow clones that produce special milk that can increase the speed and ease of **cheese-making**.

The researchers in Hamilton say their herd of nine transgenic cows make highly elevated levels of milk proteins - called casein - with improved processing properties and heat stability.

Cows have previously been **engineered** to produce proteins for medical purposes, but this is the first time the milk itself has been genetically enhanced.

The scientists hope the **breakthrough** will transform the cheese industry, and - if widened - the techniques could also be used to "tailor" milk for human consumption.

But opponents of GM foods continue to doubt whether such **products** will be safe.

The researchers, led by Goetz Laible, engineered cells in the laboratory to overproduce casein proteins. The cells were **then** fused with cow eggs.

The resulting embryos were transferred into recipient cows, and 11 transgenic calves were born. Nine were found to produce the enhanced milk.

One protein, called kappa-casein, increases heat stability in the cheese-making process.

The other, beta-casein, improves the process by reducing the clotting time of the rennet, which curdles the milk.

It **also** increases the expulsion of whey, the watery part of milk which remains after the cheese has formed.

The cows are now producing milk with 8-20% more beta-casein, and double the normal amount of kappa-casein.

Reporting their findings in the journal Nature Biotechnology, the scientists said that controlling levels of the two proteins could offer big **savings** for cheese manufacturers.

"When projected on to the production **scale** of the dairy industry, the increases observed in our study represent large changes that would translate into substantial economic gains," they wrote.

World Economic Forum: Can it help restore confidence?

The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum **is underway** in the Swiss resort of Davos with unprecedented security.

The Swiss authorities say any aircraft making **unauthorised** flights over Davos could be shot down.

A major part of the discussions at the forum will be how to restore confidence in the **global economy**.

The United States led war against terrorism could soon lead to military action in Iraq.

This could pose a **further** threat to an economic system already shaken by stock market falls, corporate scandals, and threatened by poor economic growth in many parts of the world.

How do you think confidence in the global economy can be restored? Has your trust in world business and political leaders been shaken?

The economic model of the Global Economy is fundamentally **flawed**, and only a few people are not in denial about this. We need a system of zero growth which favours the people who actually do the work. Capitalism will surely fall, **as** the size and "resources" of the Earth are not infinite.

Steve S, USA

My trust in the global economy will be restored when it becomes morally and legally wrong for individuals and corporations to **wield** the power that comes from extreme wealth. Extreme concentrations of wealth skew the markets and even the most benevolent corporations end up making dangerous decisions. Retain space for ambition, yes, but let's have the markets do their job and **get rid** of the corporate equivalent of gang rule!

Simon, Canada

I think my trust has increased **since scandals have been made** public due to the high vigilance given to this subject matter. Corporate scandals and bad economic times are at the forefront of the news, which makes it a lot tougher for illegal practices to slip by.

Denise, USA

My trust in business leaders and multi-corporations is exactly the same now **as** it was two years ago. I trust them to be greedy, morally bankrupt and not to give a damn about anything other than their own salaries.

Rhiannon, UK

There are too many reasons to list here why my trust in most western government/business leaders has been crushed. One of them **however** is that whenever real change is promised, it usually **turns out to** be nothing more than a marketing exercise. When they sincerely put aside their own short-term, self-serving aims for the greater good, then I'll stop being so cynical.

Pete, UK

What lies ahead for education in 2003

As soon as the party hats have been put away and the New Year celebrations have faded, there will be one big issue bulging in the education secretary's in-tray.

The future of student fees and university funding will have to be determined.

After a review that has dragged on for over a year, this month will finally see the fruits of Labour's long hard thinking on a topic that has dogged them since taking office.

In the latest round of controversy, the government was accused of planning huge hikes in tuition fees to pump extra money into universities.

This has been denied - and it seems increasingly unlikely that students and their families will face mortgage-sized up-front fees.

Student protests and the prospect of scaring off middle class voters appear to have tilted the argument towards a payment system that begins after students have graduated.

But nothing is certain and the Education Secretary Charles Clarke has no easy options.

Cash shortfall

Mr Clarke will be the third successive Labour education secretary to wrestle with student funding - with neither of his predecessors having found a solution that pleased either students, universities or the Labour backbenches.

This reflects the complexity of the problem.

The finsbury park mosque attracts police attention

Finsbury Park mosque is a three-storey modern brick building which **nestles** between quiet Victorian terraces and low rise tower blocks.

It has a reputation as a **hotbed** of extremism, and is just a stone's throw from the busy and, as locals described it, sometimes "dangerous" north London artery of Seven Sisters Road.

But residents say the mosque and its immediate **surrounds** are usually very quiet - and they were quite surprised by the raid.

"It's no problem at all. It gets very busy on Fridays with all the **worshippers** but usually it's quite quiet," said one man who lived nearby.

It's no problem at all - actually, I hadn't even realised it was a mosque," said another woman.

Other residents were **startled** to be woken at 0230 GMT by the sounds of a police raid and what they thought was the mosque door breaking open.

Local civil servant Matt Newman was awoken by what he assumed was a **battering ram** which "sounded like a train".

"Before that there were about four people shouting in a foreign language but that's pretty normal around here - shouting," he said.

Another resident, who did not want to be named, said: "I was up at the time. I saw loads of police going in - they very quickly **cordoned off** the area and had a couple of armed units walking around the outer perimeter to make sure people knew this was a major incident," he said

Motor neurone disease

Motor Neurone Disease (MND) is a group of related diseases affecting the motor neurones in the brain and spinal cord.

Motor neurones are the nerve cells along which the brain sends instructions, **in the form** of electrical impulses, to the muscles.

Degeneration of these cells leads to weakness and wasting of muscles.

Some groups of muscles are **more affected than others**.

The symptoms are usually first apparent in the arms or legs. Initially, they tend to be mild, and can include stumbling and difficulty holding objects.

Weakness and wasting in the muscles supplying the face and throat can also lead to problems with speech and difficulty chewing and swallowing.

In the advanced stages of the disease, a patient may become almost totally immobile. The rate of progression of the disease, however, varies enormously from patient to patient. **On** average the disease takes three to four years to run its course.

There are no remissions but people may experience a "plateau" lasting weeks or months while no deterioration occurs.

MND usually has no impact at all on intellect or memory.

The disease also has no impact on the five senses of sight, **hearing**, taste, smell and sensation.

The bowels and bladder are not affected by the disease, but diet and exercise should be carefully monitored.

The cause of the disease remains a mystery.

The disease is often difficult to diagnose.

A **range** of tests are needed to rule out other conditions.

Often an Electromyograph (EMG) is used, in which a needle is inserted into various muscles to measure their electrical activity. Sometimes a muscle biopsy will be carried **out** so that a small sample of muscle can be examined under a microscope. At present there is no cure.

Online sales race ahead of High Street

IMRG said online sales were 79% **higher than** a year ago, with shoppers "deluging" e-tailers with £949m worth of **orders** in the three available Christmas shopping weeks.

This compared with year-on-year growth on the High Street of 4.1%, **according to** British Retail Consortium figures.

John Lewis Direct managing director Simon Palethorpe said he thought the growth indicated increased confidence in **online shopping**.

"We also see it as people who had previously only been buying books and CDs branching out to **more** ambitious purchases as they become more sophisticated internet users."

He said John Lewis Direct had seen demand at three times 2001 levels.

A bottle of wine a second

IMRG said online sales were greater across all sectors, but sales of alcohol did particularly well.

Gifting sales - **whereby** the e-tailer wraps the present and sends it direct to the recipient - were also extremely popular.

Historic taiwan flight lands in china

There **have been** no direct Taiwan-China flights in 50 years

Taiwan's largest airline, China Airlines, has made history by becoming the island's first carrier to land in mainland China in more than 50 years.

The charter flight arrived in the Chinese city of Shanghai via Hong Kong at 0852 (0052 GMT), where it picks up Taiwanese who want to travel back home to celebrate the lunar New Year holiday.

People **on both** sides of the Taiwan Strait have not been able to legally fly or sail across the 160-kilometre-wide (100-mile-wide) **body** of water since Taiwan and China split amid a bloody **civil war** in 1949.