



Magical birds Bennet Gartside and Roberta Marquez in a pas de deux from *The Firebird in Sampling the Myth*, part of the Deloitte Ignite festival at Covent Garden

Start walking and lose weight to prevent an epidemic of arthritis

Chris Smyth Health Correspondent

Britain will be crippled by an arthritis epidemic driven by obesity, with one in ten people set to be affected within two decades, campaigners have warned.

A population that is getting older, fatter and less active means that 8.3 million people could have knee arthritis by 2035, double the current number, Arthritis Research UK has predicted.

People have believed the “pernicious myth” that exercise is bad for the joints and doctors must prescribe activity to prevent and treat arthritis, the charity said. It wants a campaign to tell people that the obese are up to six times as likely to develop arthritis as their joints struggle to cope with the load.

Professor Alan Silman, medical

director of Arthritis Research UK, said: “People increasingly understand the message that diet and exercise can reduce their risk of heart disease and diabetes. We need a similar focus on reducing arthritis which can affect millions and blight their lives. Arthritis is not inevitable, nor should living in pain every day be acceptable, it’s time for a new approach to reduce the risks of developing the condition.”

Osteoarthritis, the most common form of the condition, results from painful wear on the joints and, if unchecked, can leave people immobile and make everyday tasks agonisingly difficult. About 150,000 people a year with the condition have hips and knees replaced, costing the NHS £2 billion a year. Arthritis is also the most common

reason to be off work sick, costing the economy 30 million working days and many billions of pounds.

Professor Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer for England, has called muscle and bone problems such as arthritis an “unrecognised public health priority”. She said: “These painful, disabling conditions of joints, bones and muscles can devastate the lives of those living with them. Our ageing population, rising obesity and reduced levels of physical activity will increase the prevalence of these conditions.”

One study found that obese women who lose 5kg can halve their risk of developing arthritis, while activity can help to treat the condition. People who lose 10 per cent of their bodyweight typically see big improvements in their

symptoms, said Benjamin Ellis, a rheumatologist and lead author of a report for Arthritis Research UK.

Doctors need to be trained to offer knee exercises and encourage people with arthritis to walk more “before reaching for the prescription pad and surgical knife”, he said. “There’s this perception out there that if you have joint pain, what you should do is rest, so being more active is a really important treatment that isn’t there in the public imagination,” he added.

Middle-aged people should be encouraged to use “twinges” in the joints as motivation to lose weight and start exercising more, as preventing joint pain could be a stronger motivation for some people than avoiding diabetes, Dr Ellis argued.

Scientists follow their nose and find a fix for knees

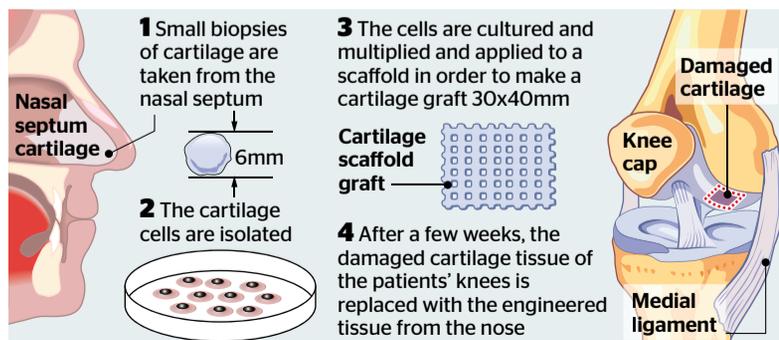
Kat Lay

If your knees need a repair, the solution could be quite literally in front of your eyes. Cartilage from the nose can be used to fix torn cartilage in the knees, researchers have found.

Ten people have already had nose-to-knee transplants, following trials in goats at the University of Basel.

Cartilage, the tissue which covers and cushions the surface of joints, has little ability to regenerate when damaged. Injuries can be difficult to repair, often requiring complicated surgery and long rehabilitation times.

In the study, described in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*, scientists took cartilage cells from the septum and grew them on a miniature



scaffold. The engineered graft was then put into the knees to replace damaged cartilage tissue.

They found that the cells, once transplanted into the knee, began to look ge-

netically like the cartilage cells they had replaced, a sign of adaptability.

Ivan Martin, professor for tissue engineering, who led the research team, said the treatment went “from lab

bench to bedside”. The first patient was treated almost two years ago, and the tenth last week.

While longer-term assessment will be needed, Dr Martin said that the treatment “seems to be working”. Some patients had even begun playing football again — and picked up new injuries. The team also looked at cartilage from the ears and ribs, but nasal cartilage’s unique ability to regenerate made it the most suitable for transplant.

Nasal cells’ capacity to form new cartilage is conserved with age, meaning that older people, such as those with osteoarthritis, could also benefit.

Jane Tadman from Arthritis Research UK described the use of nasal cartilage as “a very exciting field of research with a lot of promise”.

Police shoot dead man who made knife threats

A 40-year-old man who was shot dead by police in Islington, north London, in the early hours of yesterday morning had been threatening a woman with a knife, Scotland Yard said. The woman, who is believed to have known the man, was said to be unharmed and was being treated for shock.

Residents said that they were woken at lam by a volley of gunshots “like fireworks” and saw the area swamped with police cars and armed officers. Police said that the man, who has not yet been identified, died on his way to hospital about 20 minutes later. The incident has been referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

Hillsborough order

A report submitted days after the Hillsborough disaster expressing concern about policing on the day was suppressed, an inquest into the death of 96 Liverpool fans has been told. Frank Brayford, a retired chief inspector, said he was told by an officer from West Midlands police, who was investigating the role of the South Yorkshire police at the match in 1989, to “stop putting in reports about Hillsborough”.

Caravan stowaway

A suspected illegal immigrant has been found clinging on to the bottom of a caravan on the M20. He has been transferred to Home Office immigration enforcement, said Kent police. On Thursday Sue Taber, 59, from Dover, found a migrant hiding on the back seat of her Fiat Panda, while staff on a cross-Channel ferry used a fire hose to force back migrants who tried to storm the ship in Calais. Far-right protest in Calais, page 17

End of the ratings war

The rise of on-demand television could signal the end of ratings wars on traditional channels, the writer of *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who* said. Asked during a Q&A session on reddit.com about the effects of Netflix and other services, Mark Gatiss said: “I think we’re living in a fascinating new age for broadcasting. People are watching TV and movies in an entirely new way ... It’s slightly alarming, but very exciting.”

Russia snubs spy inquiry

The Russian government has refused to take part in an inquiry into the death of the poisoned spy Alexander Litvinenko. The investigative committee of the Russian Federation, a law-enforcement agency that answers directly to President Putin, said it did not agree with allowing evidence influencing the inquiry’s findings to be held in closed session. The main hearings will begin on January 27.

‘Taffs’ abuse acquittal

A man has been cleared of racially abusing Welsh club doormen after calling them “taffs”. James Davis, 24, from Blakeney, in the Forest of Dean, was alleged to have abused the bouncers in Lydney, Gloucestershire, after he was ejected from a nightclub in the town in January. Mr Davis was found not guilty of a charge of racially aggravated harassment at Cheltenham magistrates’ court.