Letters to the editor

increase haemoglobin synthesis and erythropoiesis. Further clinical and fundamental research is warranted to establish the possible beneficial effects of (oral) iron chelation treatment on RA activity and the anaemia of chronic disease.

G VREUGDENHIL
Department of Internal Medicine
Zuidzijdsplein
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
A J G SWAAK
Department of Rheumatology
Dr Daniel den Hoed Cancer Center
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
C DE JEU-JASPERS
H G VAN EIJK
Department of Chemical Pathology
Erasmus University
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Correspondence to: Dr A J G Swaak, Dr Daniel den Hoed Clinic, Department of Rheumatology, Groene Hilledijk 301, 3075 EA Rotterdam, The Netherlands.


Occurrence of trauma before arthritis onset and B27 positivity distribution among 209 patients with seronegative spondyloarthropathy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patients</th>
<th>B27+</th>
<th>B27-</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With trauma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without trauma</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fisher's exact test: two tailed p=0.55; uncorrected $\chi^2=0.73$; p=0.39.

Habitual knuckle cracking and hand function

Sir: In a recent survey Castellanos and Axelrod evaluated 301 consecutive outpatient at Mount Carmel Mercy Hospital to determine whether habitual knuckle cracking is a risk factor for hand dysfunction. They found no relation with osteoarthriat, but noted that 'knuckle crackers were unlikely to have hand swelling and lower grip strength' and concluded that 'habitual knuckle cracking results in functional hand impairment'. I believe they have not established cause and effect in these interesting correlations.

Not everyone can crack their knuckles. Some do so with ease, whereas others are quite incapable of performing the feat. No one has determined how the joints of these groups differ. It is quite possible, for instance, that metacarpophalangeal joint laxity may both facilitate knuckle cracking and impair hand function. As this hypothesis implies that hand swelling and diminished grip occur secondary to articular structure rather than abuse, it may be that nervous citizens of Detroit can continue to crack their knuckles without fear of injury.

"Will cracking my knuckles hurt my hands?" remains a common gambit when a rheumatologist is identified, much among new acquaintances striving to make conversation. I still believe that the answer to this question is no, but perhaps it is time that we really found out.

Habitual knuckle cracking and hand function.

P A Simkin

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