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What about hunter-gatherers?

Did the authors of a recent report on "refrigerator blindness"¹ consider that men, as hunters, are programmed to spot moving game, whereas women, as gatherers, are programmed to spot stationary edible plants and fruit?

Just a thought.

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Doubts about lutein

I found it amusing that in the same issue in which one of *CMAJ's* editors educated Steve Arshinoff about the journal's new conflict of interest policy,^{1,2} there is a rambling opinion piece by Sylvia Santosa and Peter Jones on the possible benefits of lutein in the eye.³ I know the journal's policy had not taken effect at the time of submission, but I feel I must respond to the article.

To date, there has been no convincing research to show lutein supplementation to be of any real use in age-re-

lated macular degeneration. The evidence that lutein can slow the progression of cataracts is spotty at best, as demonstrated by the articles that are cited in this piece. The first reference is a review article,⁵ albeit of the data mined from the Beaver Dam Eye Study. Although the scope and size of the Beaver Dam Eye Study are laudable, it was not really a prospective study from which causality could be established. The nutritional information in the study was gathered using questionnaires, which are always subject to recall and compliance biases. The Beaver Dam Eye Study also suffered from "multiple looks": relationships were investigated for any and all possible population factors. The bottom line is that even though a role for lutein in treating age-related macular degeneration and cataracts was suggested in these two references, the studies don't demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship. Plausibility is an important criterion for causality but it is not a sufficient one.

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[The authors respond:]

We agree that there is no strong research that directly examines the protective role of lutein in ocular disease. Although we recognize the limitations of epidemiologic evidence, we realize that such evidence may provide some insight into the potential role of

lutein in ocular disease. In addition to the article citing epidemiologic evidence that shows a potential protective effect of lutein, evidence from the NHANES (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey) study that found no relationship was also cited. Although only randomized clinical trials would show causality, in our article we acknowledge the limitations of conducting such tightly controlled research, such as the difficulty in measuring oxidative stress in the retina. Thus, whether lutein may prevent oxidative stress in the retina remains unclear. Accordingly, we feel that our article weighs the merits and disadvantages of lutein fairly and is not strongly supportive of its role as a nutraceutical. As such, we are completely in agreement with Ari Giligson that randomized clinical trials are required to establish a more definitive position for use of the lutein as a prophylactic to ocular disease, a position that is entirely in keeping with the spirit of our article.

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Competing interests: None declared for Sylvia Santosa. Peter Jones is part owner of Nutritional Fundamentals for Health, a company that sells lutein as one of its products.

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News and independence

In their latest protest about editorial autonomy¹ the editors note that the CMA declined their invitation to present the association's views. Perhaps as a long-time member I might be allowed to compensate for this reticence.

The editors' opinion, as I understand it, is that they should be independent, i.e., free to "select content without interference" and not "subject to censure." In other words, they should be allowed to edit, censor and delete at their pleasure, and answer to no one.

I think it was Stanley Baldwin who