



In the news . . .

Spirochete hits Canada

For the first time, the spirochete that causes tick-borne relapsing fever, *Borrelia hermsii*, has been found in humans in Canada (*J Clin Microbiol* 1998;36:3505-8). Researchers from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control isolated the bacteria from 3 acutely ill patients in the Okanagan valley in southern BC in 1995 and 1996. Tick-borne relapsing fever was first reported in the area in 1932. However, the culprit in these illnesses was not definitively identified until now.

Eat nuts, stay healthy

Eating more than 5 ounces of nuts a week means a significantly lower risk of coronary artery disease, according to an analysis of the longitudinal Nurses' Health Study involving more than 80 000 women (*BMJ* 1998;317:1341-5). After adjusting for many risk factors, the researchers found that eating nuts reduced the risk of both fatal heart disease and heart attack. Although nuts are high in fat, the fats are unsaturated; nuts also contain vegetable protein, magnesium, vitamin E, fibre and potassium.

Genetic "pill"

Gene therapy can be given in a simple pill, successful experiments to correct lactose intolerance have revealed (*Nat Med* 1998;4:1131-5). The researchers gave experimental animals an orally administered virus containing the missing transgene needed to produce lactase. The therapy allowed the animals to "recover" from lactose intolerance. The authors point out that gene therapy — heretofore considered only for life-threatening illnesses — may be safe and simple enough to treat even minor genetic ailments.