



Figure: Latent time during day and night in controls and patients

*Significant difference between patients in day and night ($p < 0.01$).

The latency of response was longer in patients than in controls during the daytime (4.1 [0.5] vs 2.8 [0.4] s, $p < 0.05$). Although the latency of response did not differ between day and night in the controls, the response in the patients was delayed in the night (figure). Severe delay of the response (> 5 s) in the night compared with that in the day was observed in 14 patients (56%) with multiple lacunar infarctions in bilateral basal ganglia lesions.

We conclude that night-time might be an important risk factor for the development of aspiration pneumonia in elderly patients with cerebrovascular disease.

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Treatment of anaemia with weekly iron supplementation

SIR—Iron-deficiency anaemia is an important public health problem in most developing countries. To address this problem, intervention programmes have been initiated in which iron tablets are distributed through the primary health care system.¹ Anaemic individuals or those at risk should take a daily dose of medicinal iron for 2-3 months. However, despite large scale programmes, little success has been achieved during the past decade, since the prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women and school children remains high. Factors such as low compliance rates, insufficient tablet distribution, and low compliance among subjects all contribute to the reduced efficiency of supplemental iron programmes.² Tablet distribution and compliance are negatively influenced by a lengthy duration of required daily ingestion.^{3,4} When it

Supplementation	Haemoglobin (g/L)		
	Begin	End	Change
Daily (n=42)	113 (85-119)	129 (102-148)	16 (-3 to 40)*†
Weekly (n=38)	112 (87-119)	125 (101-141)	13 (-3 to 51)*

Values are mean (range).

*Significant within-group change ($p < 0.001$).

†No significant difference between treatment group, $p = 0.145$; repeated measures of variance.

Table: Haemoglobin at beginning and end of a 9-week supplementation period in two groups of women receiving daily versus weekly iron

comes to improving iron status, an animal study has indicated that twice weekly supplementation is just as effective as daily supplementation.⁵ We studied whether daily doses of iron supplements are really necessary in anaemic non-pregnant female employees of a cigarette factory in middle Java, Indonesia.

Haemoglobin concentration was measured in all 380 female workers by use of blood from a fingerprick. The haemoglobin concentration was distributed normally in this surveyed population. 94 of the 380 women were anaemic with a haemoglobin below 120 g/L. Of these anaemic women, 86 entered the experimental supplementation study (8 women were pregnant). Each of the 86 women was allocated at random to one of two iron supplementation schemes. At the end of the trial, only 80 women remained; the others were forced to drop out when they moved or developed disease. Of these 80 women, 42 had taken one tablet per day containing 200 mg dehydrated ferrous sulphate (60 mg elemental iron) and 250 µg folic acid. 38 had received the same tablet at an interval of once a week. The total duration of the supplementation period was 9 weeks. Tablet distribution and compliance was supervised. At the end of the supplementation period, haemoglobin was again determined by the cyanomethaemoglobin method by use of a Compur Minilab (Bayer Diagnostic, Germany).

Haemoglobin values in both groups were similar at the start of the supplementation. As shown in the table, the haemoglobin in both groups increased significantly after treatment ($p < 0.001$). There was no significant difference in the average change of haemoglobin between the two groups ($p = 0.145$).

We conclude that supplementation on a weekly basis with a relatively low dose of medicinal iron is as effective as daily supplementation in improving the iron status of individuals with moderate anaemia. There is an urgent need for similar studies among different anaemic risk groups, such as pregnant women and schoolchildren.

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