**A daily deluge of data**
If you feel you’re suffering from information overload, you may have a point, says The Daily Telegraph.

According to a new study, we’re each bombarded with the equivalent of 174 newspapers’ worth of data each day – five times more than in 1986, before the advent of 24-hour TV, mobile phones and the internet. We also churn out far more data. Back in 1986, we sent out around 2.5 newspaper pages of information a day, mostly by post, telephone and fax, says the team at the University of Southern California. By 2007, this had rocketed to six newspapers, largely thanks to our increased use of text messaging, email and social networking sites. “These figures show that we are in the middle of the information age,” said Dr Martin Hilbert, who led the project. “When you think that 100 years ago people were lucky to read the equivalent of 50 books in a lifetime, but now most children have watched a couple of hundred movies.” However, it is not, he said, something we need worry too much about, as “the brain is very plastic and very good at understanding and processing information”.

**The protective effect of milk**
Children who drink a daily glass of milk have a significantly reduced risk of developing bowel cancer as adults, according to the results of a new study in New Zealand, says the Daily Mail.

Scientists at the University of Otago undertook the research after noting that the country’s bowel cancer rates had halved following the introduction of free school milk in the 1930s (it was abandoned in 1967). Their study compared 562 bowel cancer sufferers aged 30 to 69 with a similar cohort of healthy volunteers. Each was quizzed on health and lifestyle history, including how often they had drunk milk during childhood. If as children they drank milk daily for at least four years, their risk fell by almost 20% – after six years it was reduced by 40%. Long-term milk consumption builds up high levels of calcium in the body, which may protect the bowel against damage, or kill cancer cells before tumours form. Free school milk was introduced in this country in 1940, but withdrawn for all but the youngest children in 1971 by the then education secretary, Margaret Thatcher (aka the “Milk Snatcher”).

**You can go to work on an egg**
Scientists have found that the cholesterol content of eggs has gone down by so much that they are no longer the health risk they were once thought to be, says The Sunday Times. A study by the US Department of Agriculture has found that eggs contain 13% less cholesterol than they did a decade ago, with a large egg containing 185mg, down from 212mg in 2002. There has been a similar decrease in Britain, caused by improvements to the diets of battery hens since the banning of bone meal after the BSE crisis in the 1990s. A medium-sized egg now contains less than 100mg of cholesterol, well below the recommended maximum daily allowance of 300mg.

**Mapping prostate cancer**
The genetic code of prostate cancer has been mapped for the first time in a breakthrough that could transform our understanding of the disease, says The Daily Telegraph. A team of US scientists sequenced the genomes of seven prostate cancer tumours along with some unaffected tissue, to see how the DNA had been mutated or damaged in the cancer tissue. They found 21,000 mutations in the tissue, as well as more than 100 rearrangements where whole sections of DNA had broken free and reattached themselves to other parts of the genome. Most of these alterations to the normal genome are known as “passengers”, and cause damage but not cancer. However, a small number are “drivers”, which lead to the disease. The researchers hope that their research will lead to better treatments for cancer, as well as earlier diagnosis. Separately, researchers have discovered a link between early baldness and prostate cancer. The study, involving 669 men at a hospital in Paris, showed that those who started to lose their hair by around 20 were twice as likely to develop prostate cancer later in life as a control group. The findings (which need to be verified by follow-up studies) could be used to identify men who should be screened early for the disease – the second most deadly cancer among men in Europe, after cancer of the lungs.

**Why Van Gogh’s sunflowers are brown**
Van Gogh was famous for the intensity of his colours, particularly his vibrant yellows – but some of these are turning brown. Now scientists have discovered why this is happening, which might lead to ways of reversing the process, says a report published in Analytical Chemistry.

In the 19th century, artists began experimenting with new industrial pigments. Van Gogh favoured chrome yellow, which is known to darken in sunlight – but curiously, some yellows have browned more than others. To find out why, scientists took three historic tubes of chrome yellow, blasted them with UV light to simulate ageing, then used powerful X-rays to examine the paint that browned quickest. They found that a change in the oxidation state of the element chromium seemed to be to blame, and that this tended to occur when the paint had been mixed with compounds containing barium sulphate. Since barium sulphate was a component in a white pigment used at the time, they speculate that Van Gogh mixed his yellow with white, perhaps to make the paint go further – but the addition eventually robbed the yellow of its intensity.

**Don’t reproduce in space**
Astronauts sent to colonise Mars should avoid falling pregnant en route. According to research into radiation by Nasa biophysicists, high-energy particles bombarding the spacecraft would almost certainly kill the egg cells in any female foetus, making it more difficult for the crew to establish a viable colony after landing on the Red Planet. Galactic cosmic rays pose a particular problem: these consist largely of very high-energy protons and charged atomic nuclei. Such charged particles can blow apart biological molecules such as DNA, and would easily pass through the aluminium shielding of a spacecraft. Sex is a tricky subject for Nasa: its code of conduct states that “relationships of trust” among astronauts are to be maintained at all times.