

# Study Hall: Summer 2017

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## **Prescription overload**

The number of older Americans taking three or more psychiatric, pain, or sleep medications more than doubled between 2004 and 2013, according to a study co-led by Columbia psychiatrist Mark Olfson '95PH. He says the findings suggest that physicians are overprescribing these drugs to seniors and thus putting them at risk for health problems that can occur when the drugs are combined.

## **Inspired by love**

Dating someone from another culture can boost your creativity, according to research by Jackson Lu, a PhD candidate at Columbia Business School. After administering creativity tests to 109 students at France's INSEAD business school at the beginning and end of their ten-month MBA program, Lu found that those who engaged in "close intercultural romantic relationships" during their time at school saw their scores rise sharply.

## **How old is your brain?**

Columbia University Medical Center researchers Asa Abeliovich and Herve Rhinn have identified a common genetic variant that accelerates brain aging and may influence an older person's risk for neurodegenerative diseases. The discovery is expected to point to new therapeutic targets for the treatment of age-related brain disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.

## **Smog relief**

Folic acid and vitamin B6 and B12 supplements can protect your cardiovascular and immune systems against damage caused by air pollution, according to a study coauthored by Andrea Baccarelli, the chair of the Mailman School of Public Health's environmental health sciences department.

### **It takes a village**

Autistic children who spend a lot of time with a grandmother are diagnosed an average of five months earlier, according to a study led by Columbia Business School economist Nachum Sicherman '87GSAS. He says the findings suggest that family and friends may be more likely than parents to recognize early-warning signs of autism in a child, because their points of view may be more objective.

### **Blowing in the wind**

Faculty and students at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs and Columbia Engineering recently analyzed trash on New York City streets and found that 41 percent of it is plastic. Lead researcher Ester Fuchs says the findings support recent calls for legislation requiring the city's retailers to charge shoppers a small fee for single-use plastic bags.



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