

And now we know...

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1. A million British people are being forced to work part-time because of the recession. Figures released last Monday by the Office for National Statistics revealed that between March and May this year a record 927,000 employees, 38% more than last year, were working fewer than 30 hours a week because they could not find a full-time job.

Companies including BT, British Airways, KPMG, Ford and Honda have all offered staff the chance to work fewer hours or take extended holidays, in some cases to cut costs. John Philpott, of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, said: "This is a temporary phenomenon relating to the recession."

2. Mothers really do favour first-born children. The parenting website Mumsnet collected more than 100 confessions from mums about the special treatment they meted out to their oldest child. One said she rubbed shampoo into her own eyes to make sure it didn't sting; one admitted to sterilising her first baby's bottle steriliser and a third said she had blowdried her baby's bottom with a hairdryer after changing her.

One mother said: "First child: suckable items must be sterilised in steam after they're dropped on the floor. Second child: items must be wiped over with a clean, damp cloth. Third child: give them to the dog to lick clean."

3. Why a gin and tonic is particularly good at helping you unwind. The drink's relaxing effect is as much due to the lemon as to the alcohol, say scientists at the University of Tokyo. Breathing in the scent of the fruit reduces stress because it contains a chemical known to calm people physically.

Akio Nakamura, a researcher, said that until now the benefit of smelling linalool (which is also used in massage oils and pot pourri) was thought to be psychological. However, tests have proved that it has a physical impact, affecting genes and blood chemistry. "Stress-induced changes in 109 genes were significantly repressed by linalool," he explained.

4. The days of Japanese knotweed could be numbered. Scientists have requested government approval to introduce a tiny insect into Britain to destroy the invasive weed. The 2mm-long **Aphalara itadori**, which also comes from Japan, feeds by sucking the sap from the plant.

Since it was brought to this country in the 1840s by Victorian gardeners, knotweed, which can grow to 9ft in just four months, has smashed through roads, railways and buildings and has cost £1.6 billion a year in abortive attempts to remove it. If the government grants the scientists' request, it will be the first time that biocontrol — the use of one species to control another — has been used in Britain.

5. A million Britons used cocaine last year and 60 children were admitted to hospital with acute cocaine poisoning. The British Crime Survey statistics come a month after Britain was dubbed "Europe's cocaine capital" by the UN.