

New Year's List

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Consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds but pick a single breakfast and eat it every day. Save variety for later meals as early morning is no time for creative preparations. Stalk your grocery store aisle for John McCann's steel cut Irish Oatmeal, a breakfast sleeper in a tin can. Check the company's Web site (mccanns.ie) for the batch recipe that keeps in the refrigerator for a week. And for people who perceive themselves too busy for breakfast – a hunk of cheese as you go out the door is a good, fast breakfast on the go.

Always keep two dogs. If either dog gets fat, you and the dog are probably consuming too many calories. Dogs provide more reliable protection than burglar alarms as burglars like being around strange dogs less than cats do. If you need to lose weight, try the Dr. Edward St. Martin dog diet: Eat half of what is on your plate each meal and give the other half to your dog. This diet might not be in the dog's best interest, but the inspiration is crystal clear – caloric restriction is much simpler than “working it off.”

Jogging is best reserved for those times you need to escape from a thug. Jogging converts excess caloric intake into aches, cramps and bad knees. Walking, bicycling and swimming are much better ways to exercise. You are less likely to get mugged walking with a dog or riding a bicycle. But swimming is the safest urban exercise of all. Ever heard of a person swimming getting mugged or hit by a car?

Moisturize, moisturize, moisturize. “Our humidity comes with mixed blessings – more acne from sweating but less dry skin and eczema problems,” says dermatologist Nia Terezakis. Dr. Terezakis recommends plain Avena or Lubriderm as two moisturizers that fit the bill for most New Orleanians. Some prefer creams to liquids, and some formulas have less of a greasy feel after use. And, it's best to use one for your face that contains sunscreen with an SPF of 15 to 30.

If your primary care physician raises his or her eyebrows at the mention of a certain potion, specialist or test recommended by a well-meaning friend, beware and proceed with caution. A recent report by the American College of Physicians documented outcomes for persons with primary care physicians – better quality of life, more productive longevity, reduced hospitalization, fewer complications and better coordinated care.

If you need a new dentist, pick a busy one. A dentist with holes galore in the appointment book is more likely to find things that need fixing. This also goes for many medical specialists – including surgeons. And while we're in the mouth, most mouthwashes are a waste of time and money for regular flossers and brushers. A much better “swish-through-your-teeth-and-spit mouth wash” is dirt-cheap hydrogen peroxide, which whitens teeth while reducing gingivitis. Those brown bottles on the store shelf are 3 percent and can be used full-strength. Follow up with a plain water rinse to banish the peroxide aftertaste.

Splurge on toilet paper. Even in troubled economic times, it pays to spare no expense taking care of certain body parts. After more than 50 years of daily ongoing personal research, I have reached a singular conclusion – Charmin Plus is the best toilet paper made by man. It contains a “touch of lotion with Aloe” that “leaves skin soft and smooth.” After Hurricane Katrina, Charmin Plus evacuated from my grocery store shelf; I ordered online from drugstore.com until it resurfaced.

Avoid soda like the plague. Plain water should be your beverage of choice. If all the Cokes and sodas disappeared, we would have a healthier world. Maybe the little cocaine in the recipe caused some level of addiction to these sugar bullets a century ago, but I fail to understand their hold on our society today. Even diet colas are nothing more than a witch's brew of artificial sweeteners, flavors and acids that erode tooth enamel while leaching bones of calcium.

Fast food outlets are the creation of the devil. Local urban gardener Jimmy Delery says we consume too much dead food and he's not referring just to meats. There is a direct correlation between the growth of fast food outlets and obesity over the past 50 years, and it's not only due to too much television. I can understand an occasional drive-through meal purchase but too many people eat fast foods daily. Join the New Orleans Chapter of the Slow Food with Poppy Tooker. Fresh and even frozen foods prepared at home are healthier.

Get your nutrients from the bounty of a varied diet. Snake oil salesmen have mesmerized our society for centuries, even though almost every dietary supplement subjected to critical testing fails to show any preventive benefits – with the exception of persons at high risk for late-stage macular degeneration. I believe it was Calvin Trillin who summed it up best, if all those vitamins and supplements are really good for you, why do all the people selling them look so unhealthy? Put your money to a more useful purpose.

Try a saline nasal douche for sinus problems. The Neti Pot, as demonstrated on the Oprah Winfrey Show a few years back, really works. These genie-lamp-like devices wash away pollen and dirt-laden mucus from your bilateral personal air filters. Larger drugstores carry several brands. One is SinuCleanse, which is also available online for less than \$20. If you're really congested, something

resembling a little green oyster is likely to slide out. Use once or twice daily if actually congested, while once-a-week douching is good for prevention.

Keep sleeping pills in the bottle and not in your tummy. An occasional sleeper is fine, but the incidence of nighttime falls and bizarre behavior soars with nightly use. Sleep disorders are an over-medicated problem in our area. Consider a sleep evaluation but run, not walk, for a second opinion if your doctor recommends some sort of throat surgery. Most sleep problems are better treated medically. Dr. Gregory Ferris, one of the first presidents of the Southern Sleep Society, is the dean of sleep medicine in New Orleans.

Sleep in a pair of socks every night. Warm feet keep the heart happy. Loose socks are best – cashmere blend in the winter and 100 percent cotton in warmer weather. The theory is as blood cells cool in the feet, so they're more likely to fragment, releasing artery-clogging substances. People with warmer feet also sleep better. Instead of counting sheep, try socks on your feet at night.