

Santé!

Holistic Health News from Dr. Sarah Cimperman
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"The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise man grows it under his feet."

James Oppenheim

Twelve Ways to Improve Your Health

By Sarah Cimperman, ND

It's never too late to improve your health, whether you want to prevent future disease or treat current conditions. Use this guide to outline your personal twelve-step program or focus on one issue each month to make 2008 your healthiest year yet.

Evaluate Your Current Condition

If it's been awhile since you've seen your doctor, schedule an appointment for a routine physical exam and any lab tests she or he thinks is necessary. Discuss your health concerns and goals, family medical history and risk factors for chronic illnesses. Review medications, supplements, diet and exercise habits. Formulate a plan with your doctor to optimize physical, mental and emotional health.

Stop Smoking

People who smoke cigarettes have a higher risk of developing lung cancer, throat cancer, emphysema, ulcers, gum disease and cardiovascular diseases such as high blood pressure, coronary artery disease and heart attack. Cigarettes are also unhealthy for people exposed to second hand smoke. If you smoke, quit now. If you need help, talk to your doctor. Quitting isn't easy, but it is essential for optimal health.

Clean Your Kitchen

A healthier diet and lifestyle starts in the kitchen. Cooking your own food allows you to choose ingredients and methods of food preparation, imposing quality control that isn't possible when dining in restaurants, ordering take-out, grabbing fast food, or snacking on processed food products. Clean out your cupboards, pantry, fridge and freezer. Eliminate pre-packaged meals and snacks, sugar, artificial sweeteners and white flour. Instead, stock whole grains like brown rice, quinoa and millet; less processed sweeteners like maple syrup and honey; legumes like lentils, beans and dried peas; fresh fruit and vegetables; frozen spinach and berries; tinned fish like sardines, herring and mackerel; and healthy snacks like raw nuts and plain yogurt. Buy a cookbook or check one out from the library if you need to familiarize yourself with preparing whole foods or are looking for new recipe ideas.

Exercise Everyday

Regular physical activity reduces the risk of chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, depression, diabetes and

dementia. Exercise doesn't have to happen in a gym, as long as the key components are there: aerobic exercise, strengthening exercise and stretching. Once you have your doctor's permission and a recommended target heart rate, start slowly and gradually the increase time and intensity of your workouts. Meet with a personal trainer if you need instruction or inspiration. From hiking and biking to swimming and squash, get out there and get active. Aim for a minimum of 30 minutes five days each week, but at the very least, sedentary individuals can start with a daily walk around the block.

Eat More Vegetables

A vegetable-based diet is full of fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients that are important for good digestion, optimal health and disease prevention. Aim for seven to nine servings each day. In most cases, one half cup equals one serving, but when it comes to raw green leafy vegetables like lettuce, count one cup as one serving. Benefit both your body and your community by shopping for fresh, seasonal, organic produce (and pastured animal products) at local farmers' markets.

Eliminate Processed Foods

After you have eliminated processed foods from your kitchen, eliminate them from your diet completely. Unlike whole foods, they lack fiber, nutrients and water. Most processed foods also contain additives and preservatives that can have negative impacts on health.

Take a Steam or Sauna

Increase circulation and detoxification with a weekly visit to a steam room or sauna. First get approval from your doctor, then start with one fifteen-minute session each week. Remember to replace lost fluids by drinking extra water and compensate for lost electrolytes by eating foods that contain concentrated amounts. Good choices include celery, broccoli, artichokes, parsnips, mustard greens, apricots, figs, watermelon, kiwi and kidney beans.

Relax

Counter stress by incorporating relaxation into your daily schedule. Yoga, tai chi and qi gong are good choices that offer other health benefits as well, including better balance, flexibility, strength and coordination. Even easier, meditation and breathing exercises can be done anytime, anywhere. For a basic breathing exercise, position yourself so that your spine is straight and exhale completely. Inhale quietly through your nose for a count of four, hold your breath for a

count of seven, then exhale through pursed lips, making a “whoosh” sound, for a count of eight. Repeat three or more times.

Sleep Better

Good sleep is critical for good health. Lack of sufficient sleep can be associated with high blood pressure, overweight and obesity. Sleep deprivation may also increase production of stress hormones in the blood and elevate levels of inflammatory substances, increasing risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. To get a good night’s sleep, evaluate your mattress and pillows for comfort and support and replace them when needed. Make your sleeping environment as peaceful as possible and avoid working, watching television or using computers in the bedroom. If you have trouble sleeping, choose relaxation techniques over medications, which cause daytime drowsiness, create dependence and lose effectiveness over time. Talk to your doctor about natural alternatives or medical conditions that may be interfering with sound sleep.

Drink More Tea

Staying hydrated with teas that are full of antioxidants and cancer-fighting compounds. Choose low-caffeine green or white tea, or caffeine-free herbal or rooibos tea, also known as red tea. Drink them hot or cold, several times per day.

Have Fun

Spending time doing things that you love is good for you. Once considered a mere myth, the mind-body connection is now supported by scientific studies and recognized as an important factor in health and disease. Because mental and emotional conditions can affect physical well-being, taking time to have fun benefits your whole body.

Seek Supplements

A doctor trained in the use of nutritional and botanical medicines can create an individualized plan for supplements to address current conditions and disease prevention. Never self-diagnose and seek expert advice before taking medicines, whether natural or pharmaceutical.

Ask the Doc: Colds and Cold Weather

Does cold weather cause colds and flu?

*Ramona
Hoboken, NJ*

Several studies concur: cold weather doesn't cause colds and flu. Viruses do. But colds and flu are certainly more common during winter months. Two things may explain this association: increased exposure and reduced resistance.

During cold weather, people spend more time indoors. And during the winter holidays, people spend more time socializing and traveling, increasing exposure to others who may carry contagious cold and flu viruses.

Cold, dry weather can also compromise the body's ability to fight cold and flu viruses during a time when they are most likely to thrive. Viruses that cause colds and flu survive best in conditions of low humidity, which is common during winter months. Dry weather can lead to dry mucus membranes in the mouth, nose and throat, making these tissues more susceptible to infection.

To prevent colds and flu, avoid others who are sick whenever possible and encourage people you work or go to school with to stay home when they come down with an upper respiratory infection. Wash your hands with warm, soapy water frequently (there is no need for antibacterial soap, the regular variety works just as well). Also avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth.

If you do catch an upper respiratory infection, drink lots of fluids to keep mucus membranes moist and get plenty of rest. For more home care treatment of colds and flu, stay tuned for next month's article.

Research Review: Turmeric and Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Research studies have confirmed the antioxidant and anticancer properties of turmeric. There is now reason to believe that it may be useful in inflammatory bowel disease as well.

Researchers in Japan studied the effects of curcumin, a constituent of turmeric, in ulcerative colitis (UC), an inflammatory bowel disease. The

randomized, placebo-controlled trial included 89 patients in remission from UC. One group received two grams of curcumin each day in divided doses and the other group was given a placebo. After 6 months, 8 out of 39 participants in the placebo group had a relapse of the disease but only 2 of the 43 patients taking curcumin relapsed. Researchers concluded that turmeric is a safe and promising treatment for maintaining remission in patients with ulcerative colitis.

Hanai H et al. Curcumin maintenance therapy for ulcerative colitis: randomized, multicenter, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Clinical gastroenterology and hepatology*, 4(12):1502-6, Dec 2006.

Savory Vegetable Custards with Tumeric

Packed full of vegetables and protein, these savory custards can be served as a nutritious main course for breakfast, lunch or brunch, or as an appetizer for dinner. They are delicious fresh and hot from the oven or at room temperature, so take them with you to school or work for an easy lunch or a healthy snack. Shorten preparation time by substituting the vegetables in this recipe (leeks, mushrooms, garlic and spinach) with 1 1/3 cups of leftover veggies.

Extra virgin olive oil, first cold pressing
1 cup chopped leeks
½ cup chopped shiitake mushrooms
2 cloves garlic, crushed or minced
Turmeric
½ cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
Sea salt
Ground peppercorn
4 eggs
1 cup milk
Crumbled goat cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 350F. Add a few drops of olive oil into each of 4 individual ramekins, at least 8 ounces each. Use clean fingers to spread the oil over the inner surface of each ramekin. Prepare several cups of boiling water.

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the leeks and sauté until they begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and continue cooking until all vegetables are tender. Add the garlic and sprinkle enough tumeric over the vegetables to provide a light

dusting. Stir to incorporate, then cook one more minute. Remove from the heat and add the chopped spinach, breaking apart the leaves as you drop them into the mixture. Season with salt and pepper, taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Divide the vegetable mixture among the ramekins and add crumbled goat cheese if desired.

Whisk together the eggs, milk and a pinch of salt. Pour it into the ramekins, just covering the vegetable (and goat cheese) mixture.

Place the ramekins in a baking dish and add enough boiling water to fill the dish halfway up the ramekins, taking care not to pour water into the ramekins. Bake for 20 minutes or until the centers become solid, slightly puffy and lightly golden brown. Serve immediately or cool to room temperature and refrigerate until ready to eat.

Yield: 4 servings*

*You can make any number of servings by using 1 egg, ½ cup milk and 1/3 cup cooked vegetables per individual ramekin.

Lentils with Red Wine and Tomatoes

Pick a light and fruity wine for this simple and satisfying dish, like a Pinot Noir, or use whatever red wine you have on hand.

1 cup dried lentils, sorted and soaked for up to 4 hours
2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, first cold pressing
1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
1 can whole peeled tomatoes in their juices
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 large sprig thyme or 1 tsp dried thyme
1 bay leaf
Ground peppercorn
½ cup red wine
Sea salt to taste

If you haven't soaked the lentils, sort and put them in water now while you start preparing the dish.

Warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until soft and starting to brown, 8 to 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, empty the tomatoes and their juices into a bowl. Crush them with clean hands or a vegetable masher. Set aside one cup for this recipe and reserve the rest for future use.

Once the onion starts to brown, add the garlic, thyme, bay and peppercorn. Stir and continue cooking for another minute, or until the garlic becomes aromatic. Add the wine and reserved tomatoes; stir.

Strain and rinse the lentils, then add them to the pot. Stir to incorporate all the ingredients and bring the mixture to a gentle boil. Simmer for a few minutes more, until the liquid starts to reduce and it coats the lentils.

Add enough water to cover the lentils. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer until the lentils are tender but have not lost their shape. This could take 20 to 40 minutes, depending on how long the lentils were soaked.

Once the lentils are tender, season with salt to taste. Remove the bay leaf before serving.

For a heartier dish, stir in a cup or two of fresh spinach until the leaves are wilted, or add ½ cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained, and stir until warmed through.

Apple Almond Oatmeal Pancakes

½ cup raw oats (old fashioned, not quick-cooking)
½ cup whole wheat flour
½ tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp baking powder
¼ tsp baking soda
2 tbsp finely chopped almonds
½ cup plain yogurt
1 tbsp honey
¼ cup water
1 egg
½ tsp vanilla extract
1 cup applesauce
¼ cup golden raisins
Extra virgin olive oil, first cold pressing
Maple syrup or extra honey for garnish

Combine the oats, flour, cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda and almonds in a large mixing bowl. Use a whisk to mix ingredients well.

In a separate bowl, add the yogurt, honey, water, egg, vanilla and applesauce. Whisk together until well-combined. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix until just combined. If the batter is too thick, add a little more water until the desired consistency is reached. Stir in the raisins.

Warm a skillet over medium heat and add just enough olive oil to prevent pancakes from sticking. Ladle batter onto the hot skillet and cook until bubbles rise to the surface, about 2 to 3 minutes. Flip and cook for another 2 minutes, or until pancakes are golden brown. Drizzle with honey or maple syrup and serve immediately.

Yield: 6 large pancakes