

All the bulbs are planted and the lawns have been mowed for the last time this season. The words of the English Renaissance poet Thomas Campion come to mind: "Now winter nights enlarge." The late fall is a cozy time and a good one for taking stock and laying plans for the coming year. My agenda includes improving my health and well-being and laying the groundwork for a long life. Here's my plan for 2009.



Pizza and other processed foods must be rarities. I will not skip breakfast! I will take a vitamin D supplement, especially in the dark months ahead. I will eat more sparingly, like slender Catherine, who has practised caloric restraint throughout her life.

### IMPROVE MY ORAL HEALTH

I must upgrade my dental-hygiene tools and technique and spend more quality time with the toothbrush, the dental floss and the Stim-U-Dents. Oral health greatly influences general health, as Lisa van de Geyn makes clear in "Watch Your Mouth!" (p. 26). That reality was recently brought home to me the hard way. After an 18-month battle with a sinus infection that resisted several types of antibiotics (see "Antibiotics Sampler," p. 43), corticosteroids, saline sprays and surgery, I had a slightly loose (but otherwise untroublesome) molar removed. Its roots had perforated weakened bone around my left sinus, providing a kind of Holland Tunnel through which oral microbes were entering uninterrupted. In addition to constant congestion, blowing and breathing problems, it caused fever, dizziness, cheek swelling, temple headaches, and pain, itchiness and ringing in my left ear. It disappeared with the tooth and has not returned.

**BE MORE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE** In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish explorer Ponce de León spent years scouring Florida for the mythical fountain of youth. He never found it, but the nearest thing to it is quite easy to come by: exercise. Just ask my mother-in-law, Catherine Phillips. Catherine turned 100 this past August, and despite crippling osteoporosis, she swims 20 lengths a day at her local pool. Legally blind, she also has severe arthritis in her hands and a body bent almost double with curvature of the spine. But when she slips into the pool, she is a young and agile creature, streaking up and down the lanes in a fast crawl. Her doctor says her vital signs are those of a 50-year-old. Maybe I'll swim, or maybe I'll get toned with dance, as Jennifer Lockyer recommends in "Ballet Workout" (p. 44).

**AVOID SELF-BLAME** A lot of people tend to beat up on themselves, and I'm one of them. I love to sweat the small stuff, which is good for proofreading *Canadian Health* articles but not for maintaining psychological equanimity. As Catherine says, "I always do my best, and I never blame myself. I never look back or indulge in regrets. The only way to go is forward."

**EXERCISE MY DIVINE RIGHT TO DOWNTIME** Regular time off should not be considered slacking. It is necessary and recuperative and improves overall performance, just like resting your muscles after a long run or a hard workout. We've come a long way since the days when poor Bob Cratchit had to beg Ebenezer Scrooge to let him spend Christmas morning with Tiny Tim, but many Canadians still don't take their full vacation entitlements. That includes me: I worked a few hours every day of my vacation week this summer just because my portable computer made it possible. Let's all solemnly swear not to be ruled by our laptops, cellphones and PDAs.

**LEARN SOMETHING NEW** Here again, Catherine is a role model. Although she can still read with the aid of a brightly lit magnifying device, she's attending Braille school against the time when her machine fails her. She also takes cooking classes for the blind and is constantly knitting warm hats and mitts for the homeless.

**EAT BETTER** On my grocery list will be more fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, whole grains and legumes, lower-fat dairy products and leaner cuts of fresh meat. I plan to consume less salt, choosing yogurt over cheese and fresh cucumber over pickles. I will eat fish twice a week and serve meat-free meals regularly.

I'm hoping that taking steps like these can help me achieve Catherine's impressive lust for life and longevity. Won't you join me?

Diana Swift  
 Editor-in-Chief  
 editor@canadian-health.ca