

So the economy has contracted, markets have shrunk and housing sales and prices have faltered. The Bank of Canada has officially declared a recession. A worrisome situation, but one in which it's more important than ever to keep our health firmly in our sights.

Financial worries and fears of burgeoning debt increase stress and can trigger depression, two states that prompt unhealthy lifestyle choices. To assuage our sorrows, we may be tempted to overeat, drink too much or, heaven forbid, smoke. Some of us may take on extra work, thereby decreasing the time available for physical activity and decompression. We may feel hesitant to renew our memberships in pricey health clubs. Perhaps we'll forgo buying those cross-country skis or those new mountain bikes. We may dig in and watch television at home instead of getting out to a stimulating play or concert.

But it is possible to stay healthy without spending money. A brisk 30-minute walk a day will benefit your cardiovascular system and improve blood circulation to your brain. Check out *Canadian Health's* walking primer, "Born to Walk," in our inaugural Fall 2006 edition. (Go to www.canadian-health.ca and click on Past Issues.) Weather permitting, plan on walking or cycling a few times a week to some destination that you'd normally reach by car or public transportation. You'll save money and boost your fitness level. And your own home abounds with humble household objects — from cans of food to laundry baskets and vacuum cleaners — that will approximate a workout at the gym (see our January/February 2007 article "No-Excuses Exercises").

Don't forget to tap into the fitness facilities that your tax dollars are already paying for: public pools, rinks, recreation centres and free events launched by your municipality. And if you have to skip your annual trip south this year, why not use the time to reacquaint yourself with your home turf? Take different routes to work, shop in a different supermarket on the other side of the city or attend services in different places of worship. In a word, take a therapeutically distracting sabbatical without leaving town.



If you can manage to eat a couple of vegan meals per week and buy cheaper cuts of meat such as flank steak rather than strip loin, you'll simultaneously ingest less saturated fat and spare your pocketbook. Remember the days when the pampered lord of the manor expired early from a diet of rich artery-clogging meats, while his faithful serfs lived longer lives eating gruel and black bread and toiling in the fields?

Eschew the shopping malls and big stores. There are fine items to be had in second-hand shops and charity stores.

Focus ahead to 2010, when the global financial situation is expected to normalize. Do as many as possible of the things you love to do. Try not to worry — worry never paid a bill — and an essential component of bodily health is a healthy peace of mind.

This might also be a good time to get involved in your community. Through the Heart and Stroke Foundation, I'm going to sign up for a course in CPR and learn how to use a life-saving automated external defibrillator.

Here are my editor's picks for our Winter 2009 issue. Before you exert yourself shovelling snow or spend long hours doing extra work on the computer, take a look at two of our featured articles. One is "Back Off!" (p. 34) — a feature on protecting your all-too-human spine by our Montreal-based contributing editor, Lucie Turgeon — and the other is "Repetitive Strain Injury" — Dr. Aly Abdulla's lucid discussion of this signature problem of the fast-paced, keyboard-crazed workplace (p. 20).

Check out Pat Rich's update on heart health (p. 30). Keep your brain alert this winter by taking Laura Jones's advice in "Items of Interest" and playing brain games, including some online freebies (p. 10). Have a care for your body's largest organ and follow M.L. Bream's recommendations for winterizing your skin (p. 49).

And bear in mind that the winter won't last forever, and by the time our next issue reaches your doctor's office, we'll be one-fourth of the way through this challenging year.

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