

Well, dear readers, we've made it through the winter of our (extreme) discontent. And if the economic climate hasn't changed much with the advent of spring, at least the weather has improved. As I emerge from the hibernation of the past few months, here are a few items that strike me as worth sharing with you.



water supplies. Despite fears fanned by the media, Dr. Peter Cooney, Canada's chief dental officer, notes that to get an acute toxic dose of fluoride, an adult male would have to consume at least 15,000 litres (3,300 gallons) of optimally fluoridated H₂O in a single sitting! The panel also found no evidence to suggest that children should avoid drinking water fluoridated at currently accepted levels.

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION Roses are red, violets are blue, and looking at these colours appears to influence your cognitive function. When your eyes see red, for example, your concentration on detail-oriented tasks is boosted, according to researchers at the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Seeing blue, on the other hand, improves your performance on creative tasks.

Led by Dr. Juliet Zhu, the investigators reached these conclusions after monitoring the performances of more than 600 subjects doing tasks that required either attention to detail or creativity — mainly on computer screens coloured red, blue or white. In some cases, red enhanced performance on detail-oriented tasks such as memory retrieval and proofreading 31% more than blue. But for brainstorming and other creative activities, blue cues prompted participants to produce twice as many creative outputs as red.

Why? Zhu thinks it's because red, as the colour of STOP signs, warning flags, flashing emergency vehicle lights and teachers' marking pencils, is associated with caution, danger and error. Blue, the soothing colour of water and sky, makes people feel tranquil and therefore safe being open, exploratory and creative. "So as you struggle with the minutiae of your income tax return this month, consider moving your desk in front of a red wall or curtain," says Zhu. "It just may help."

THE TEETH-BODY CONNECTION Dental disease is the No. 1 one chronic disease among children and adolescents in North America. And as mounting evidence shows, oral health is intricately linked to overall bodily and psychological health. One way to attack dental disease is to ensure that all citizens have access to optimally fluoridated drinking water. But is fluoridation safe? you ask.

Yes. Last year, an expert panel commissioned by Health Canada studied the latest science on the safety of fluoridated water and reported that it had no adverse health effects at levels found in Canadian municipal

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has called water fluoridation to prevent tooth decay — and subsequent oral health problems — one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.

THE HEALTH-NUT CONNECTION Nuts are increasingly entering the Canadian diet as healthy snacks and textured touches in salads and stir-fries. Of all tree nuts, the almond is the alpha. This peach of a nut — almond trees are grown by grafting cuttings onto deeper-rooted peach trees — is richer than other tree nuts in protein, vitamin E, calcium and magnesium. It has more potassium than most others as well. A 28-gram (one-ounce) serving of almonds contains three grams of fibre and 34 milligrams of phytosterols, plant cholesterols that lower blood cholesterol, including "bad" LDL. That's why these nuts are a staple in the Portfolio Diet, a multi-centre cholesterol-reduction study led by the University of Toronto's Dr. David Jenkins.

"Apart from the nut's astounding nutritional profile, almond flour is a good alternative to wheat flour for people who are gluten-intolerant," says Gina Sunderland, a registered dietitian based in Winnipeg. And although a serving contains about 160 calories, because of nuts' hard texture and protein and fibre content, your digestive system may not absorb all the calories. Nuts also produce a feeling of satiety, so you may bypass calories you'd consume by reaching for other snacks. A study at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., found that 344 calories' worth of almonds a day caused no weight gain but increased blood levels of antioxidant vitamin E.

I hope you're celebrating the return of spring with whatever rites you prefer. *Canadian Health* will catch up with you again in July with tips for a healthy summer.

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