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Plastic Surgery: Now, some health advice you haven't heard before

**By DR. ALAN MUSKETT
For The Gazette**

I don't know how many articles I've read over the past couple of weeks regarding advice for improving health in the new year. They all say the same things, and all are boring and exceedingly pious in tone. I believe that there is a secret plot, promulgated by the CIA, the Trilateral Commission and the vast Ambidextrous Conspiracy to keep us from enjoying ourselves. As one of your Health section voices of truth amidst the cacophony of whole-wheat-rabbit-food-eating Birkenstock propaganda, I will enlighten you regarding the great myths of health maintenance. Let's go down the list.

Quit smoking. Ever hear that one? A recent study from Atlanta showed that emergency room visits for heart attack dropped 40 percent when an indoor smoking ban was passed for bars and restaurants. Remarkably, the very first study of that kind was done in Helena, with similar results. So? One of the keystones of the Billings-area economy is health care. Cardiovascular disease and cancer care are two of the three major product lines for both St. Vincent Healthcare and Billings Clinic. The last thing we need from a regional economic standpoint is a big drop in cancer and heart disease. Many of my homeboys are cardiovascular and cancer doctors. They have expensive toys and exotic supermodel spouses. Do you want to be responsible for them having to drive a Honda instead of a BMW? The horror.

Frankly it would be unpatriotic for you to quit smoking. In times like this, everyone has to do his or her part.

President Barack Obama was bullied into smoking cessation, but others must stand firm. The British National Health Service calculated that smokers actually had lower health care costs over a lifetime than nonsmokers, meaning that smokers actually helped their country. By dying young, actually, but that is beside the point.

Lose weight (yawn). Another tired pearl of drivel. It is only common sense that a skinny person is far more likely to get run over crossing the street than a bigger person. You can't see the string beans. Also, a wiry vegan will do a whole lot less damage to the front end of your F-150 than your basic offensive tackle, so you are less likely to swerve to miss them. Being inadequately padded will harm your love life, as no one wants to get too close to a lot of sharp edges. Sixty percent of your brain is fatty acids, which might explain why the lettuce and tofu crowd is so dull. The list is endless.

Exercise more. Several of my colleagues are these ropy, jack rabbit types who ride their bikes hundreds of miles a month. They have resting heart rates of 45, body fat of 8 percent and cholesterols well below their IQ. They will live forever, but ... not so fast. In the last few years there have been multiple rib fractures, a pneumothorax, a fractured pelvis, broken legs, wrists, a crushed trachea, etc. These guys have racked up more health care spending that Dick Cheney.

So use a treadmill, you say? Remember the cartoon the Jetsons, how George got pancaked? I don't think so. I have yet to get injured watching football on TV, unless you count that time I got tangled up in the beer tap and cracked my head on the subwoofer. Exercise is dangerous and wears you out besides. No one every tore an ACL changing the channel.

Eat right. I read this thing where you are supposed to "eat the rainbow." Different-colored foods, such as lettuce, red peppers, blue berries, etc., are supposed to give you fiber and antioxidants and vitamins and all that stuff. I guess I would have to agree with some of that. Both Skittles and peanut M&Ms come in all those colors, and I try to cover the spectrum.

This thing with cholesterol has to be individualized. The central

molecule of most hormones is cholesterol, and low cholesterol is fine for you hybrid-driving metros who use a lot of skin care products, but those of us with fairly massive testosterone outputs need at least two cheeseburgers a day to stay flush. I am not opposed to new thinking in nutrition, as I am looking forward to the introduction of the Organic Hostess Ding Dong.

Remember the most important thing you can do for your health: get people in your life. It is our connection to others that enriches and sustains us. Relationships are either built-in (family) or intentional (everything else). It's hard when you are tired, or have worked all day to go to meetings, groups, church, volunteer jobs, games, theater or classes.

We are becoming a society of cocoons, home in front of a screen of some sort, while our civic organizations and civility in general dwindle.

Isolation is definitely not healthy, and without mental health we cannot enjoy physical health. People and relationships don't happen, they are hard work and can be disappointing and frustrating at times. There are, however, those evanescent joys of connection, those delectable reinforcements of our humanity, that Skittles and beer in front of the TV cannot match.

Dr. Alan Muskett is a board-certified plastic surgeon at Billings Plastic Surgery. More information is available at www.billingsplasticsurgery.com.