



Track to Wellness in 2010

by J. Douglas Overbeck, MD, FACC

The holidays are behind us. By now, you are probably relieved to finally be putting away the decorations that just a few weeks earlier were nostalgic, but somehow have now just turned gaudy. And, yes, the remorse now sets in as you remember the one-too-many cups of egg nog that you drank and the extra appetizers and desserts that you noshed on this holiday season.

Yes, as remorse sets in, so does the temptation to set goals – big goals! We're ready to burn those calories and lose those extra pounds. We make promises to keep those goals, declaring that this year is THE year. But why does it take a drink like egg nog, laden with a whopping 340 calories per cup, to get us fired up to get healthy? It seems like the shock value is what it takes to make change these days.

Take the Cleveland Clinic, for example. They created a shock factor by recently announcing that they would no longer hire smokers.

It seems our government is considering the shock factor as well. Right now there are grumblings in Washington about the implementation of a "fat tax" to help offset the price tag of the impending health reform bill. This would involve adding an excise tax to unhealthy foods such as many processed foods, sodas and even cheeseburgers. While it might sound offensive to some, the shock of it does make one stop and listen to the facts, such as:

- Two-thirds of Americans are afflicted by obesity, accounting for \$147 billion a year in medical bills, according to a study funded by the CDC Foundation.
- Forty percent of American adults will be obese by 2015*. The same study estimates that a 10 percent excise or sales tax on fattening foods could raise \$522 billion over the next 10 years.
- Obesity-related issues account for more than \$200 billion in health care spending annually.
- Center for Children's Health Innovation reports that by the time kids enter kindergarten, over 26 percent are already overweight or obese.

The fact is, as a country, we are fat and we need to change our ways. So how can you do your part to take responsibility for your health? Reminding yourself to be responsible for your own health is the first, most important step. Here are some other tips to help you stick to your health goals in 2010.

- **Be aware of what you eat, when you're eating it.**
- **Leave a little on your plate.**
- **Exercise a little each day. Just 30 minutes of walking can make a big difference.**
- **Read labels and avoid too much processed foods.**
- **Chart your progress.**

While we all face our goals enthusiastically in the beginning, temptation is seasonal. There's decadent chocolate on Valentine's Day, calorie-laden beer around St. Patrick's Day, delicious ham and jelly beans for Easter and don't forget the indulgent backyard barbecues that come with Fourth of July and Labor Day. For every occasion, there's another excuse for indulgence. Stick to year-long habits even during times of temptation. If you remember to take responsibility for your health every day, you can steer clear of unnecessary calories and stay on the track to wellness. Let's push back from the table and buy a pedometer. Let's start this year with the only healthcare reform that we really want: our actual health!!

*The Urban Institute and the University of Virginia

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