

Resolutions and other Moments of Insanity

Did you actually make a list of New Year's Resolutions this year or maybe just pick out one or two "biggies" and tell someone about them? You would think we'd know better by now but I personally experienced an "epiphany" on January 1st that may help you also in the sharing.

(Incidentally, one of my resolutions was to use the word *epiphany* in a column and there I've already got that one out of the way.)

But seriously...one of the pastors at my church offered up one of those rare gems that not only feeds you spiritually, it has a Zen quality you can instantly get excited about. His point was "anything worth doing is worth doing badly." In other words, if it's important to do then even when you do it poorly, don't give up. Take a second and think just how empowering that concept is.

I guess part of the whole "I'll do better" process each January 1st develops from our need to atone for excesses during the holidays. I'm feeling pretty guilty about now and like most, much of that involves my mad dash to eat, eat, eat that started back on Thanksgiving and even slipped into 2006. I suppose remorse may have something to do with that dream last night of a Krispy Kreme van trying to run me down.

Here are a few "lifestyle changes" that I plan on using and I hope you'll note that I have no intention of giving up great food and wines:

1) Drink 12 ounces of water before each meal and before going to bed at night.

Our bodies need water and plenty of it. Before a meal it helps tone down your appetite. Just like it helps clean the outside of your body, it can do the same thing for you on the inside.

2) Don't skip meals and be sure to have a healthy, substantial breakfast.

This magnificent creation we call a body monitors food intake and adjusts its burn rate based on what is available to burn. In plain language, if you skip breakfast your body thinks you are fasting and your metabolic rate drops. The worse think you can do is skip meals all day and finish off with a huge one at night. Most of that meal will be stored as fat.

3) Use more olive oil, garlic, fresh veggies and fatty fish in your diet.

Remember the book about the Mediterranean diet? Well the people of that region still eat great and have far fewer heart problems than we do. Enjoy lots of salad and veggies when you start a meal and guess what? Your hunger is satisfied and your tendency of eating too much of the wrong foods is suppressed. Three servings of salmon, tuna or other fatty fish like mackerel or herring every week greatly increase your body's HDL levels; that's the good cholesterol!

4) Moderate wine consumption helps your cardiovascular system.

The studies often referred to as the “French Paradox” have shown that those cultures who have a glass of wine with their meals have a frequency of heart disease about 1/3 what it is in this country. We’re talking two 4-ounce glasses per day and, no, more is not better. Experts also have found that some people simply cannot enjoy any form of alcoholic beverage. If you are one of those people, don’t try. Some of the same benefits can be found in using grape seed oil or having a glass of red grape juice every night.

5) Slow down, take a deep breath and relax!

I know you’ve heard it before but it’s well worth repeating. Stress kills. Use a hobby, exercise, even moderate in nature, knitting, crossword puzzles, reading, and anything else that gives your mind a chance to calm down. I took a course in transcendental meditation in college and still use it to settle things down when life gets intense. Don’t worry...be happy.

Now I will remind you that I’m not a doctor, nor am I any kind of health expert. My personal plan comes from reading and talking to people I respect who are qualified to help me and others with health challenges. Most of all, I believe in common sense and that big things can come from tiny steps. Remember the little choo choo...you get my drift. Oh and I believe in keeping at it even when I fail from time to time. Someone told me about that in church.

Here’s a special recipe to help kick off your New Year in the right direction. This is one of my all time favorite side dishes. Kids as well as adults love it and it’s good for you.

Sautéed Baby Spinach with Sesame Seeds

(serves 4 to 6)



1 to 1 ½ pounds fresh baby spinach leaves, thoroughly rinsed
4 tablespoons extra virgin cold pressed light olive oil
4 heaping tablespoons minced garlic
2 teaspoons sesame seeds, toasted style is best
balsamic vinegar on the side

Heat your olive oil in a large stew pot with a heavy bottom over medium heat and add minced garlic. Cook garlic until it begins to sizzle, 3 or 4 minutes. Add your spinach leaves and cook until they just begin to wilt, stirring occasionally so all leaves come in contact with the bottom of your cooker and wilt. Avoid overcooking and serve immediately after adding your sesame seeds sprinkled over the top.

Good quality aged balsamic vinegar from Modena, Italy, is a great accompaniment. Season to taste but be very sparing. It only takes a small amount given the intensity of its flavor.

There are two particular red wines that would do really nicely for almost anyone who is looking for delicious, all round wines to enjoy that may also be used for health benefits. I've spoken before about German red Dornfelder wines and the **2004 Valckenberg Rheinhessen Dornfelder** is a lovely red with hints of mild black cherry in the taste and a splash of spicy cinnamon in the finish. I've watched people new to red wines taste this one and the reaction is pretty amazing.

Most point out that they never would have believed that a red wine could be so smooth and easy to enjoy.

The **2004 Viña Alarba Old Vines Grenache** was one of my top picks last year and continues to be a superb day-to-day wine. You will experience a deep ruby/purple color, full body, and wonderful kirsch liqueur and raspberry aromas and flavors interwoven with hints of licorice as well as minerals. I don't think there is a wine I've tasted over the last year that offers more bang for the buck.

Well we've made it through another year and I urge all of my friends who read this column every week to do something to improve your health in 2006. All of our columns for the last 14 months are now available to you on our website, www.winedog.com, where they can be downloaded and printed. If you'd rather talk to a real human being, I can be reached at 888-288-0668 and I'll always take time to chat. God Bless and have a healthy, happy 2006!