

Advice from Polonius

If you want to live long and save this planet you must grow trees, eat vegetables, recycle your beer bottles, and boycott tuna fish. Save on heating oil and ditch your fur coat, but warm up by jogging even though in the end it may wreck your knees and ankles. Eat less fat and more lovastatin, and your plaques will melt away. Do not inherit genes that raise triglyceride levels, especially if you're a rat. Do not come into this world between May and July: the incidence of dyslexia is three times higher than at other times. Do not agree to having an ultrasound examination in utero, lest you become left handed. Beware of the greenhouse effect: you may end up with heat stress, malaria, dengue, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain fever, or viral encephalitis.

Be calm at meals and do not stress your Shiley valve: 800 have fractured already. Keep yourself regular but make sure you're not allergic to psyllium. Note that automobile fumes aggravate allergies. Be aware that margarine may be as bad as butter and that some "authorities" think that fish won't help you either. Check your eggs for salmonella, also your cheese. Remember that cooking meat can increase the risk of colon cancer. Be careful about eating seafood. Do not live in Glasgow: the *Wall Street Journal* says it is the lung cancer and coronary death

capital of the world. Beware of pesticides in your soup and of lawvers in your daily contacts. Drink only fine calvados unpreserved cider made from unwashed apples: may swarm with *E coli*. Stay away from aniline and orthotoluidine dyes that cause bladder cancer and from herbal food supplements that cause toxic hepatitis. Be suspicious of surgeons, even if they work for health maintenance organisations. Practise safe sex. Do not work in emergency rooms or a disgruntled patient may shoot you, as happened to three doctors in Los Angeles.

Do not eat beans—Pythagoras warned against them. Eat walnuts instead: they may be good for your heart. Take a baby aspirin a day, and a carrot, some folic acid, some vitamin E, and avoid passive smoking like the plague. Stay out of the sun and use a protective screen anyway. Do not meddle with Africanised bees: they may kill you. Do not go to New York: the public lavatories are scanty and messy and potential "consumers" are suing the city. Beware of the shared communion cup: it may carry germs. Watch out for computers that have a virus or will give you carpal tunnel syndrome, for cellular phones that cause brain tumours, for a "Walkman" that may make you deaf.

Further, advises Polonius, neither a borrower nor a lender be. Do not buy high and

sell low. Do not believe everything you read in the newspapers or you will go mad. Remember when coffee caused pancreatic cancer? Now it's heart disease, but only with decaf, and decreased fertility, but only in hamsters. Does vasectomy cause cancer of the prostate? Does drinking alcohol

increase the risk of breast cancer, or is it exposure to DDT? Are mammograms useless in women under 50? Are apple shaped women more prone to developing breast cancer than pear shaped ones? Does eating alfalfa sprouts cause lupus? Can topical tretinoin prevent skin and cervical cancer, or melanoma?

So "Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment." Be prudent and heed all warnings: but remember a certain prudent man's epitaph: "Stopped smoking 1968. Stopped drinking 1973. Stopped eating meat 1981. Died anyway 1991."—GEORGE DUNEA, attending physician, Cook County Hospital, Chicago, USA.

