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Portion Size, Periodontitis and Pilates: Six Favorite Health Books of the Year

EVERY YEAR DOZENS OF BOOKS cross my desk at work, but only a handful of them end up on my bookshelf at home.

The books I choose to keep are those that contain practical advice about health or nutrition, delivered in a format that makes it easy to use over and over again. I like books that encourage a reader to take charge of his or her health, and books that offer insight about the inner workings of medicine and the human body.

Here's a look at my favorite health books this year:

■ "The Portion Teller" by Lisa R. Young, Ph.D.

By now most people are aware that we live in a world of super-sized portions. But Dr. Young, a registered dietitian and faculty member at New York University, still manages to make portion control interesting, and makes a convincing case that it's not what we eat (carbs, protein or fat) but how much we eat that really counts. She notes that most of us wouldn't eat five slices of bread for breakfast, but have no problem scarfing down the equivalent—a large bagel. Homemade cookies have gotten so big that a bag of chocolate chips now makes 40 fewer cookies than it used to. And queen-sized mattresses have grown by six inches to accommodate our ever-expanding bodies.

While these and other "portion shockers" are listed throughout the book, Dr. Young also shares practical advice such as visual compar-

isons to help you better gauge portion sizes—a deck of cards, dice, a compact disc or a baseball. She also includes easy-to-follow meal plans. To make homemade pita pizza, for instance, use two CDs of pita, a ½ baseball of sauce, a golf ball of cheese and a tennis ball of veggies.

■ "101 Diseases You Don't Want to Get" by Michael Powell and Oliver Fischer, M.D.

This pocket guide offers a quick summary of some of the worst afflictions known to man. Reading it is a little bit like watching a scary movie, but it's also a fascinating tour of the human condition around the globe. Most of us don't worry about elephantiasis, a disease caused by parasitic worms that leads to elephant-like swelling of arms or legs. But sadly it afflicts 170 million people in Southeast Asia, Africa and South America, making it the second-leading cause of disability in the world.

But living in the Western world doesn't make us immune to some of the worst health hazards. The book includes conditions common in the U.S. like osteoporosis, irritable bowel syndrome, chlamydia, West Nile Virus, Lyme disease and even periodontitis (gum disease).

■ "Why Do Men Have Nipples?" by Mark Leyner and Billy Goldberg, M.D.

This book has already become a best seller with its focus on the embarrassing and sometimes bizarre questions posed to doctors at cocktail parties. The answers to questions like: "Can a man run out of sperm?" and "Why is poo brown?" do make for interesting party chat-



ter, but that's not the reason to get this book. I think the real message of this book is one of patient empowerment, and the importance of taking charge of your health, asking lots of strange questions and finding a doctor who is willing to answer them.

■ "Tales from the Scale" by Erin J. Shea

This isn't a diet book, but it is a useful read for anyone struggling with weight or trying to stay on a diet. The book is filled with essays from seven women who tell their stories of growing up, getting fat and trying to take it off. These are stories from the front lines of dieting, dealing with childhood experiences (one woman's mother was a Weight Watchers meeting leader), honest stories about binge eating and even the depressing deflation of breast size that accompanies weight loss. Anyone who has ever faced a weight problem, big or small, will find

something to relate to in these pages.

■ "Back Rx" by Vijay Vad, M.D., and Hilary Hinzmann

At a time when many doctors still advise surgery to relieve back pain, Dr. Vad remains a staunch advocate for trying nonsurgical solutions first—and second and third.

His stance is particularly surprising since he is a sports-medicine specialist at one of the busiest orthopedic surgery centers in the country, the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. Dr. Vad and a growing number of back specialists now believe that surgery isn't really the quick fix that it once promised to be and often ends up leading to further problems and pain.

Instead, Dr. Vad prescribes a 15-minute daily yoga and pilates program. Dr. Vad's patients have to work harder to get well, but early studies have shown that after three months of the exercises, 80% of sufferers experienced dramatic improvement.

■ "A Map of the Child" by Darshak Sanghavi, M.D.

Dr. Sanghavi, a pediatrician, takes us on a tour of the human body one body part at a time. His journey starts with the lungs, followed by the heart, blood, bones, brain and other body parts, ending in the belly.

Along the way Dr. Sanghavi relates tales of patients he treated, scientific breakthroughs and stories of health problems that afflict his own family. The result is a fascinating study of the inner workings of the human machine and what happens when it breaks down, leaving the reader with an astonished appreciation for the miracle of a healthy child.

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