

# The best gift you can give



**THE DOCTOR IS IN**  
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**M**y father of blessed memory, who for the most part was a no-nonsense kind of a guy, had all these pithy little statements that seemed to make more sense the older I got. My favorite four sum up how he suggested we live our life: “There is nothing more important than your health.” “You can’t take it with you.” “There is no such thing as can’t.” “Nothing is certain except death and taxes.”

Growing up, most of us don’t appreciate how important our health is until something is wrong. And as some of us are reaching “over the hill” status (however old that is), our body is reminding us that we need to treat it with greater respect. What may have once been easy to ignore, starts to speak to us with age – and we soon discover that conversations with friends turn into “organ recitals.”

As you embrace the New Year, after having lived these past few difficult ones with COVID, hopefully you have learned that there is nothing more important than looking after your physical and mental well-being. This is a gift that you give to both yourself and your loved ones.

One of the hallmarks of aging are the innumerable visits to doctors, referrals for lab tests, screenings and more. If you are a procrastinator and still have not yet gotten around to doing those important checkups, then this column is for you. What are you waiting for?

## **Excuse 1: You have the philosophy, “If it ain’t broken, don’t fix it”**

While this may be true, remember that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Checking out something today may save you time, worry and expense down the road, and even your life. A small benign polyp removed today may prevent a colon cancer diagnosis later.

## *Fear may be so incapacitating that it may actually paralyze you*

### **Excuse 2: You don’t believe that your health should be a priority**

The list of all you need to do is ridiculously long and overwhelming. Other things far more important get your attention, and somehow the dreaded task of even making an appointment falls to the bottom of your priority list, repeatedly.

### **Excuse 3: You just don’t have time**

Calling a doctor, scheduling appointments, tests and procedures all take time and energy that you say you don’t have. You never waste time or zone out on your phone, right? If you are not prepared to book your appointment, you seriously have to ask yourself why. Let’s look further.

### **Excuse 4: You are scared**

Burying your head in the sand may often be your “go to” response. Are you scared that “they” will find something? How about the lump you have been worried about, the cough that won’t go away, or the nagging pain that you’re convinced is something serious? What if they find something? What if you have cancer?

Your mind can create a ton of different scenarios and scare you big time. Fear may be so incapacitating that it may actually paralyze you, keeping you from making a move that could save your life.

Recognize that more anxiety is generated by sitting on concerns or listening to every word from Dr. Google. Share your concerns with a close friend or profes-



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sional who will help give you a reality check and lower your anxiety. The amount of relief achieved by being an informed consumer will be far greater. Afterwards you might just say, “That wasn’t so bad. Why did I worry so much?”

### **Excuse 5: The cure will be so much worse than the disease**

“I will just live with it. It will probably go away. If I see the doctor, he’ll send me to someone else. I’ll need surgery. I will then have to do something, since I just won’t be able to leave it alone.” The truth may be just the opposite. Imagine having a conversation with your physician. What do you think he will tell you? What would you like him to tell you? Once you’ve talked it through, you may get reassurance, suggestions or a solution that you can work with.

### **Excuse 6: ‘What if it really hurts?’**

No one really likes to experience pain. A large part of pain is actually the fear of being in pain. This is one of the easiest problems to solve. These days, most people need not experience pain from procedures or illness. Not only are there medications to reduce it, but there are non-invasive techniques that can reduce pain to the point of nonexistence.

### **Excuse 7: You are embarrassed**

“I’ll get lectured at because I’ve waited so long to finally go to the doctor. What if he makes fun of me for coming to him for such a minor problem and thinks I am making a big deal out of nothing? How can I talk about things like urinary, sexual, breast issues (or prostate problems) with my doctor? That’s a bit too personal for my liking.”

Without any real evidence to support your thoughts, you may easily imagine and anticipate the worst. Once you blurt it out, you’ll be glad you did. And there is no such thing as a stupid question, just an unasked one. That said, you need to be able to talk to your doctor and feel you have a relationship where you can share anything about your own health.

### **Excuse 8: Your whole life could change**

If you think that finding something now will change your life, recognize that by waiting until much later when something serious may have progressed, you might discover that it really will change your life. Your life could also change for the better, and it would be a shame not to experience that.

### **Excuse 9: Guilt**

You are afraid that you may have passed something terrible on to your children. Blame and guilt are horrible. You can learn to let go of it all with real facts and accurate information.

SO NOW that you have no more excuses, the best thing you can do for you and your loved ones as the New Year is upon us is to make that call. Preventative medicine really is wonderful. It’s so much better to treat a problem when it is small – and screening procedures are designed with early detection in mind. While waiting for results is no fun, you can learn to be in the moment and acknowledge that no news does not mean bad news.

If you were talking with your best friend, wouldn’t you encourage him/her to check out his/her concerns? Isn’t it time that you now take the plunge and become your own best friend? Shana tova and much good health to you and your loved ones. ■

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