

by *Caralee Caplan, MD*

Ode on health and the holidays



With the holidays here, I can't help but reflect
 On some of the holiday's illest effects.
 More often we think of that end-of-year cheer
 As more than our share of some vino and beer,
 And with hung-over heads over sinks filled with dishes,
 We wish we'd not drunk quite like so many fishes.
 And the food—let's admit that there's no health in that;
 By holiday's end we've gained ten pounds in fat.
 Plates piled with latkes are one of the ways
 We remember the oil that lasted eight days;
 Though the notion is nice, of these grease-bombs be wary,
 They may find a home in your best coronary.
 The chocolate dispensed at your fifth cousin Larry's
 No doubt are the source of those post-Christmas caries,
 And remember the dinner that threw Uncle Jeff
 Right off the "low salt" and into CHF?
 You loved the roast turkey chez dear Auntie Della,
 But hated the signs of acute salmonella.
 Bean salad, gravy and hot stewed tomatoes,
 Are, after they settle, colonic tornadoes.
 And let's not forget the absolute best-of-all:
 Egg nog, the drink that's a shot of cholesterol.
 On the coin's other side, there's a whole other mess
 When you try to fit into last year's favourite dress;
 The crash diets, the shakes: they're part of the lie,
 "Give us a day, we'll reduce BMI."
 I think it's been written on ancient papyrus
 That crowded malls breed every flu-bearing virus;
 Perhaps the transmission would be somewhat less
 If we weren't so worn down by the gift-buying stress.
 And somehow your boyfriend still has the knack
 Of buying perfumes that cause asthma attacks.
 And your girlfriend has planned a great trip to Niagara,
 When all you desire's a dose of Viagra.
 And if your resistance weren't already down,
 Every relative, long-lost, will soon be in town

To hear every detail of your life and beliefs
 Banded about over mom's famed roast beef.
 And while you're upstairs applying your make-up,
 They'll hear all the tales of your most recent break-up.
 You're sure other families are just like the Cleavers,
 No doubt you'll spend New Year's in bed with a fever.
 With all of this worry and stress and oppression,
 It's no wonder this time is a peak for depression.
 And just when you thought that your life's back in order,
 You're hit with your seasonal affective disorder.
 First day on the slopes, it's the same ol' predicament:
 You're way out of shape and you pull that same ligament.
 For those who go south, it may seem like fun
 To damage your skin in the blistering sun,
 And spend half your week in the medical walk-in
 With symptoms of some rare new seafood-type toxin.
 Eat, drink and be merry, do all that entices,
 Pre-resolutions, we enjoy all our vices;
 Every pipe, cigarette, cigarillo is lit,
 Because, come the New Year, we all plan to quit.
 But as holidays end, some real hope remains,
 Perhaps this next year we'll find cures for our pains,
 And perhaps we can find some internal reason
 To help those who suffer quite truly this season:
 Those spending their days in a hospital bed
 Or without such a place to lay down their head.
 Perhaps we can all be a little more giving,
 Stay active and eat well and just enjoy living
 And nurture and cherish our personal wealth
 Happy holidays to all and to all some good health.

I would like to thank Rosemary Caplan (Mom) for her help in conceiving the subject of this poem.

Dr. Caplan is CMAJ's Editorial Fellow.