

By Ruth Ostrow

I've just had a most amusing spat with a friend who asked me to "look after" his wife at a party we're all going to in a few weeks' time. Unfortunately, he can't attend and wants someone to make sure she behaves, doesn't hit the bottle too hard and doesn't run off with someone who doesn't belong to her.

"That's like putting Casanova in charge of a harem," I laughed, "or an alcoholic in charge of the pub. I'll most likely be too busy partying, drinking and misbehaving to be keeping an eye on anyone!"

He was alarmed, flushed with rage. "But you're supposed to be a health expert, a person of high integrity. What about your yoga practice? What about your raw food diet? Aren't you supposed to be avoiding alcohol? How can you claim to be enlightened in matters of wellness?" he huffed, to which I just laughed more.

But here's the answer: I've always lived by the rule of "80/20". In fact, a Google search will turn up several recent books on the subject. The premise is that if we eat healthy foods, behave ourselves, pay our bills and be model citizens most of the time, then it is healthy to let go the rest of the time. True health is about incorporating joy into any regime.

About 20 per cent of the time I eat and drink what I like, stay up late and play like a gleeful child. Then, like all good parents, the part in me that is health-conscious takes the reins. It brings my wild side home, feeds it lots of alkaline salads and heaps of fruit, puts me to bed early, puts me up in a headstand or sends me out for an early morning jog, and makes sure all my work and household commitments are met.

Here is the million-dollar question: Why do we have to be perfect all the time? It only makes us feel angry and resentful - like any child forced to do homework on a warm summer's night or fed broccoli when their friends are eating ice cream.

And anger is worse for our immunity and wellbeing than anything we can ingest. Anger is internally and spiritually corrosive in a way that no chocolate bar could ever be.

We're taught to set too much store by keeping our bodies and minds functioning at the expense of our fragile souls. Yet there are countless stories of contented people whose faulty tickers just keep going strong.

I say "indulge in small doses". Eat, drink and be merry. Oh, and never put me in charge of keeping a party nice!

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