

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF HEALTH

The health of Australians has never been better. Indeed, we are in the top 10 of the world's healthiest nations. Each year less than 1% of our population die — not too discouraging a record considering the inevitability of death. At the same time, our newborn infants can expect to live well beyond the biblical “threescore and ten” years.

One would think that such significant achievements would be acknowledged. Not so! Year after year, we witness a cavalcade of national days or weeks focusing attention on society's overall fragility and ill-health. We are deluged with propaganda from our apostles of health, who effectively transform the healthy into the over-anxious.

Like any religion, this movement has its own commandments: *thou shalt not smoke; thy drinking of alcohol shalt be measured and moderate; thou shalt exercise regularly; thou shalt be thin and trim; thou shalt eat sparingly; thou shalt partake of breakfast; thy food shalt be high in fibre, low in fat and salt and include an abundance of fruit and vegetables; thou shalt practise safe sex; thou shalt avoid stress; and thou shalt rest regularly.*

There is also guilt. Transgressions are perceived as sins, punishable by the inexorable march of illness, loss of quality of life and a shortened life expectancy.

What are we to make of all this?

There is no doubt that observing some of the ten commandments of health is rewarded by freedom from the ravages of that morbid trio — cancer, heart disease and stroke. For observing others, however, the evidence is somewhat soft.

The ten commandments of health should not be vehicles of guilt or tyrannical conformity. After all, with these commandments come the inevitable temptations — *the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.*

**Martin B Van Der Weyden**

## LETTERS

<b>Medical indemnity</b>	
Paul Gerber	51
<b>Chronic fatigue syndrome clinical practice guidelines</b>	
Richard G Larkins, Simon R Molesworth	51
<b>Howard Florey, Alexander Fleming and the fairy tale of penicillin</b>	
Ivo D Vellar	52
Thomas B Hugh	52
Peter D Goldsworthy, Alexander C McFarlane	53
<b>Hyponatremia and hypokalaemia caused by indapamide</b>	
Laurence G Howes	53
John McEwen, John E Marley	54
<b>End-of-life issues</b>	
Susan E Kurrle	54
Bernadette M Tobin, Ian D Cameron	55
<b>Community-acquired MRSA bacteraemia</b>	
Nicholas Collins, Iain B Gosbell, Stephen F Wilson	55
<b>No obituary in the “Death and Dying” issue</b>	
H Stuart Patterson	56

## BOOK REVIEW

<b>Live stronger live longer: An exercise and lifestyle program for over 40s</b>	
Keith Hill	31

## IN THIS ISSUE . . .

2

## IN OTHER JOURNALS . . .

50

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