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wonder [2]



Never mind partridges and pear trees, your health is worth singing about—now and at any time of the year.

On the twelfth day of Christmas the health writer showed me…..

12 bells-a-ringing

Synaesthesia [3] is a 'fusion of the senses', most commonly experienced as a splash of colour in the mind when a letter or word is spoken. The number 5 may be black, for example, and the letter L light green.

For Tessa Verrecchia [4], an artist specialising in fused glass, the sound of bells created an image of vibrant colour and swirling shapes, inspiring her design for a stained glass window.

On the eleventh day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

11 Pipers piping

Tobacco toxins can trigger cancer, harm the heart, age the skin and slow the brain. It's just possible that healthy eating [5] may undo some of the damage caused by smoking – but the best advice is still to quit.

On the tenth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

Coenzyme Q10

Made in the liver and present in every cell in the body, Q10 [6] is known to boost cellular energy production (especially important in heart failure). Whether it's useful in weight loss and as an anti-ageing agent remains to be seen. Some call it the miracle cure.

On the ninth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

Blood factor 9

In haemophilia B (also known as the 'Christmas disease'), there's inadequate production of a clotting factor in the blood called Factor IX (9). I interviewed the scientist [7] behind a treatment for haemophilia B.

On the eighth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

8 ounce steaks

The World Health Organization announced that a daily portion of processed meat [8] could increase the risk of colorectal cancer. After an analysis of the research, it was concluded that we don't necessarily have to banish the bacon (or red meat) just yet, but practise moderation in our meat eating.

On the seventh day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

7 strikes of lightning

Park ranger (or Spark Ranger, as he became known) Roy Sullivan has entered the Guinness World of Records as the man most struck by lightning, having survived seven strikes. Read about [9] others struck by lightning, and how lightning can endanger the lives of its victims.

On the sixth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

6 aids to standing

The human body is designed with 6 great features [10] to help us stand, and keep us from falling over. Read about the role of the bones, the eyes, the ears, the heart, the muscles and the brain.

On the fifth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

5 great women

In the late nineteenth century, five young women raised more than half a million dollars to help complete construction of the Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore. The gift was given on the condition that women could also train as doctors – and it was here that Helen Taussig came in 1924 to earn her medical degree. She later became a pioneer of infant heart surgery, helping to save the lives of countless 'blue babies'.

On the fourth day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

4 Dickens characters

Modern doctors are amazed at the way in which Dickens described medical conditions [11] in his fictional characters long before doctors understood the diseases: Joe, the 'fat boy' in the Pickwick Papers, was afflicted by daytime sleepiness; Oliver Twist's half-brother suffered seizures; Mr Pancks in Little Dorrit may have had obsessive compulsive disorder; and Tiny Tim may have had TB.

On the third day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

3 French neurologists

Guillain, Barré and Strohl first described Guillain-Barré syndrome [12] in 1916 when they noticed a strange, self-resolving paralysis in soldiers. Today, the syndrome is still poorly understood: the immune system seems to turn against the nervous system and nobody really knows why.

On the second day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

2 voles in love

When trying to understand the effects of love on the body [13], scientists often turn to studying prairie voles: like humans, they form long-lasting monogamous relationships. The aptly-named Dr Tiffany Love from the University of Michigan describes how one brain chemical named oxytocin seems to be important in helping them pair up. In humans, oxytocin is sometimes called 'the love hormone'.

On the first day of Christmas the health writer showed me….

A partridge in an apple tree

Does an apple a day [14] really keep the doctor away?

MEDICAL JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION

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