

10 ways to a healthy 2009

Mindful exercise, gym buddies, delicious home cooking: there are plenty of easy ways to chase away your downturn gloom, says **Catherine Gray**



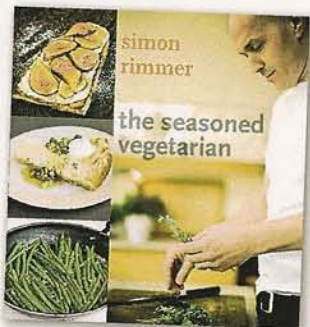
It's all most unexpected. You may think that a recession would see many people dining on cheap, unhealthy fare, drowning their sorrows in vinegar-like plonk, moaning about how they simply can't afford to go to the gym. Not the case. In fact, economy experts such as professor Chris Rhum of the University of North Carolina, who has studied behaviour in recessions, say a financial slowdown can motivate people to be much healthier. Alcohol and smoking rates drop, there are fewer heart attacks and people exercise more. What a silver lining. Here are 10 ways to turn recession gloom into a positive personal force:

1 BE MINDFUL IN THE GYM

"I see so many people working out in a dream-like trance," says leading personal trainer Jamie Baird (www.thefitnesscoach.com). "They may as well be sprawled on their sofa. A token, half-hearted work-out where you don't break a sweat is pretty pointless. And going to the gym without planning what you want to do is like going to a meeting without doing any preparation. On the way to your next work-out, mentally jot down what you want to achieve and always push yourself a little further than last time. Break up the monotony of long cardio sessions by doing five minutes cardio followed by five minutes weights. Your heart rate will stay up if you lift heavy enough weights."

2 COOK FROM SCRATCH

A Lloyds Pharmacy survey has shown that during this downturn 49 per cent of us are going to eat fewer takeaways and 29 per cent of us will cook from scratch more often. "Most people can knock off half of their food bill simply by cooking," says Joanna Blythman, author of *Bad Food Britain* (Fourth Estate, £7.99). "And that is a much, much healthier way to eat." You'll bypass all the nasty trans-fat and additives hidden in convenience food. Buy fresh and local, and don't be afraid



to haggle with local farmers or shopkeepers for the best deal. And remember, vegetarian options are great for you and cheaper. Try recipes from *The Seasoned Vegetarian* by Simon Rimmer (Cassell, £12.99).

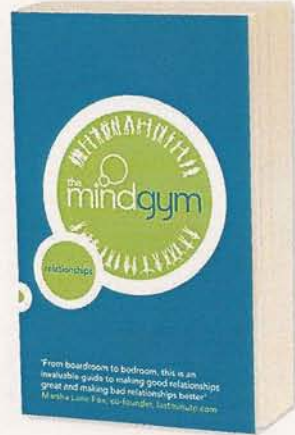
3 TEST YOUR MUSCLES

"Whether you have a fast or slow muscle twitch is key to what kind of work-out you should be doing," says Joe Fournier, celebrity trainer and author of *The Red Carpet Workout* (Headline, £7.99, available at www.amazon.co.uk). "Slow twitch muscle fibres are great for endurance activities, such as marathon running, whereas fast twitch muscle fibres are great for running for a ball or sprinting for a bus. To find out what they have more of in their muscle composition, many athletes pay up to £3,000 for a muscle biopsy that gives them a very specific fast/slow twitch answer. But for a rough answer, you can find out through my online indicator test for just £25." Go to www.joefournier.co.uk

4 INSURE THAT BODY

Run with the mantra of sound in body, sound mind by making sure you don't skimp on looking after your new, improved body. Health insurance is not something you should compromise, even when your wallet is less fortified. PruHealth does a great package where it rewards customers who exercise and try to eat well, believing that if you lead a healthy lifestyle you should pay less for your health insurance. You are likely to live longer and make fewer claims. Go to www.pruhealth.co.uk for a quote.





9 GET A "JUST DO IT" ATTITUDE

Want to learn Italian, write a novel, lose 10 pounds and see the Grand Canyon? "If you're ever going to change, the first thing you need to do is profile the end goal," reveals Dr McGuire-Snieckus of The Mind Gym, which has teams in London and New York and coaches around the world. "Write down exactly the person you want to be in one month, six months and then a year. You can't aim for something vague and untangible." Then investigate how you're going to arrive there, whether it's with a development break (where you can learn to paint or write), life coaching sessions or an evening course. See www.themindgym.com

10 GO FOR A FULL-BODY MOT

We pay more attention to our cars than our own irreplaceable bodies. The irony. A health check at a Tesco Pharmacy (see www.tesco.com) will cost you just £5 before February 18, 2009. In 30 minutes they check your weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and screen you for diabetes. Or for a more extensive check, Life Scan, a provider of health assessments which uses CT scanners, can check for very early signs of heart disease, lung cancer, colon cancer, aneurysms, osteoporosis and more. Call 0845 2179947 or go to www.lifescanuk.org for details.



5 RETURN TO A WARTIME MENTALITY

To recapture that famous British chin-up pluck, the tactic you need is mindfulness says Dr Rebecca McGuire-Snieckus, senior psychologist at The Mind Gym, which runs psychological workshops. "Wartime Britain paid attention to the little things. People knew it was the pennies they spent mindlessly that got them into financial strife rather than the big, cautious purchase. They did the cleaning themselves and only used the car when necessary. Most importantly, they paid attention to everything going into their mouth because the reserves of it were finite. For instance, if you mindlessly snack in front of the TV, it's proven you eat more." Mindfulness and self-control are muscles – the more you flex them, the easier it is.



7 ENJOY AN ACTIVE STAYCATION

Plan a break in the United Kingdom soon, whether it's horse-riding in Devon or hiking in Wales. Why? To chase away the winter blues we are all prone to during the chillier months. "Exercise reduces mild depression and professors at Harvard say that those who exercise have a 'get stuck in' mentality that gets them through any slump," says celebrity trainer Fournier. That's a win-win if ever we heard one.

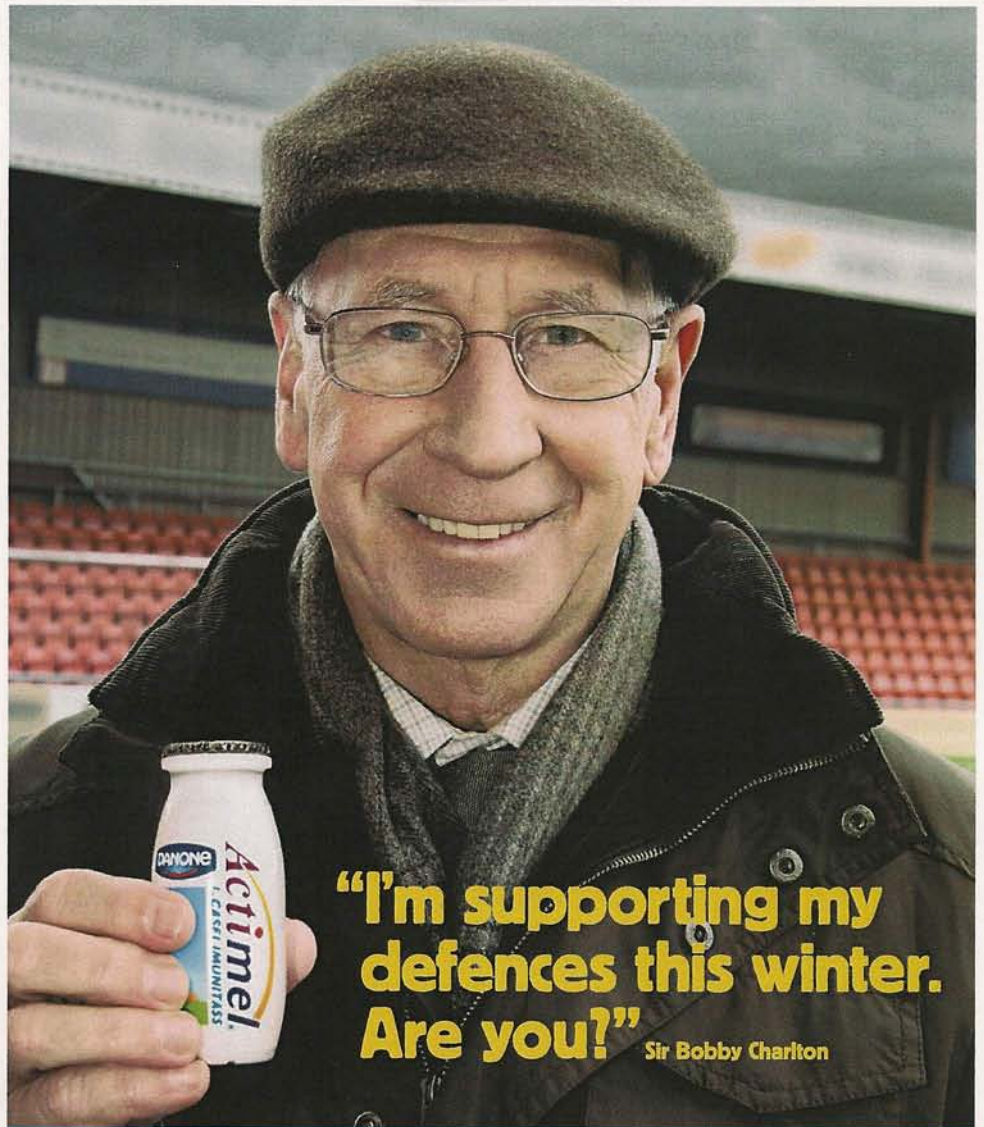
6 HEED THE ZEIGARNIK EFFECT

A well-known psychological phenomenon, this is based on the fact that it is very difficult to stop something in the middle of doing it. "It's much easier to not do it at all than to stop once you've started," explains Dr McGuire-Snieckus. So, if you're trying to quit the cigars or limit your Merlot consumption in favour of Highland Spring, one will hurt. That one can easily snowball until you've put away the whole box or bottle, since you tend to catastrophise your slip-up and then go the whole hog.



8 HAVE A FRIEND DATE AT THE GYM

"We're social creatures and don't make changes well in isolation," says Dr McGuire-Snieckus. "You'll have a much better chance of becoming healthier if you align yourself with some allies with the same intentions." Make an agreement that instead of going for an artery-clogging meal when you meet up, you'll go to a spinning class and for a sauna instead. After all, at around £600 a year, you can't afford to not go to the gym anymore. "Kettle bell training or boxercise are good stress-reducers," says personal trainer Fournier. And the latest craze for women is poolates (Pilates in a pool). See www.poolates.co.uk for more details on where to do it.



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