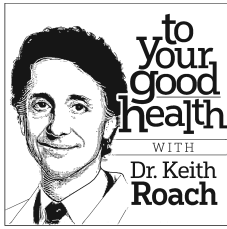


Are Big Dogs Dangerous Pets for Seniors?

DEAR DR. ROACH: I recently read that a large percentage of orthopedic injury to the elderly is directly related to their falling while walking large animals, specifically dogs over 20 pounds. Can you shed light on this please? -- M.F.



ANSWER: A March 2019 study in JAMA Surgery did identify dog walking as an increasing cause of fracture. Over 4,000 fractures were identified among dog walkers over 65 in 2017, about triple the number 10 years earlier. However, this wasn't a large proportion of fractures (only about 2% of total fractures), and the authors did not identify the size of the dog as a risk factor, although they did suggest that clinicians recommend a smaller (and well-trained) dog as a wiser choice.

Dogs not only provide some social support, they also encourage exercise. I have had many patients (and a few family members) who have very meaningful connections with their dogs and other animals. In fact, I have seen many people who describe their animal companions as the most important relationship in their lives.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am scheduled for a hip replacement operation because X-rays show joint failure. I am 81 years old and in excellent health. At the moment I do not feel any pain in my hip and am walking very easily. I go swimming three times a week. My question is whether I should agree to this operation as a preventive method to avoid later painful and possibly riskier circumstances because of my age. -- P.H.

ANSWER: Hip replacement is indicated in people with severe, debilitating symptoms (such as pain or loss of function) despite conservative management. That doesn't sound remotely like what you are describing. The findings on the X-ray are less important than your symptoms and function, so I could not recommend a hip replacement for you at this time. Age by itself is not a contraindication for hip replacement should you need one later on.

I do understand what you are saying: You are less likely to have a surgical problem being operated on earlier. Some surgeons will operate on people with milder symptoms for this reason. However, you aren't describing even mild symptoms, hence my recommendation against surgery at this time.

DEAR DR. ROACH: Just wondering about good versus bad cooking oils. At one time, coconut oil was said to be a bad oil, but now I'm reading that it's really a good oil. Some even say you should eat a spoonful each day to boost your health! So, which is it? Is coconut oil good or bad? -- J.Z.

ANSWER: Coconut oil is "bad," at least compared with healthier oils like olive oil and canola oil. It has a high saturated fat content, and people who consume coconut oil have an increase in their total cholesterol and unhealthy LDL cholesterol. If you love the taste of coconut oil, it's reasonable in moderation, but don't consume it thinking it is good for your health or your heart. The available evidence does not support that.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Joe Biden's Incredible Shrinking Presidency

Joe Biden was never exactly a colossus bestriding the Earth, but he's been getting smaller by the day.

A Washington Post poll over the weekend suggested that his presidency is, for now, a smoking political crater. It had him at a 41% approval rating, despite the passage of his long-sought infrastructure bill that was supposed to buoy him and his party.

Even more striking, the survey found that Republicans lead Democrats on the generic congressional ballot by 10 points, 51% to 41%, an unprecedentedly strong showing for the GOP that forecasts an earthquake, tsunami, and maybe a few more natural disasters for Democrats come next fall.

And who can be surprised? Biden is stumbling, out of touch, and weak. Two of his major initiatives, at the border and in Afghanistan, created completely avoidable catastrophes. He has given no sense of being in control of events or even his own party. He is an accidental president who is running smack into his own inadequacies and absurd pretensions.

No one in Washington over the last four decades ever said that Joe Biden was just the man with the foresight, wisdom and deft political touch to lead the free world.

No, he was an average senatorial bloviator whose first two presidential campaigns flamed out in embarrassing fashion, before he hit the jackpot when Barack Obama chose him as his running mate in 2008.

Showing the advantage of hanging around for a very long time, Biden won both the 2020 Democratic nomination and the presidency by default. In the primaries, the former vice president looked good in comparison to Bernie Sanders, and he ran in the general on not being Donald Trump.

Now, Biden is allied with Bernie Sanders, who helped write the first version of his Build Back Better plan, and Donald Trump no longer looms as large as Biden's foil.

The best case for Biden's presidency was that he could be a kind of consensus caretaker -- restoring a sense of normality and maintaining a low profile while riding in the slipstream of improving economic conditions and a diminishing pandemic.

Instead, he's been carried along by the left-wing tide of his party and repeatedly engaged in unconstitutional executive overreach. On top of it all, he's brought his own brand of incompetence, exemplified by the botched pull-out from Afghanistan.

His foremost mistake was overestimating an attenuated electoral mandate for pedestrian governance as a permission slip for passing nearly the entirety of the progressive agenda in the space of less than a year.

Not only has there been sticker shock over the price tag of the Biden agenda, but it has little connection to things people truly care about. The infrastructure bill polls well, but no one goes about their daily lives worried about the alleged crisis of crumbling bridges and tunnels.

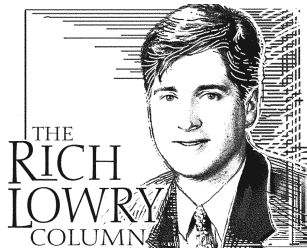
Meanwhile, the Build Back Better bill started as a \$3.5 trillion grab bag of everything that progressives want but couldn't get in the infrastructure bill. Passing as much spending as you possibly can before you lose Congress a year from now, which is essentially the rationale behind Build Back Better, is not a compelling reason for a historic spate of federal spending.

That legislation has been pared down to largely a child care and climate change bill. That's an unnatural pairing that came about not because those are the top two things that the public wants from Washington, but because they happen to be what Democrats think they can pass.

Only now is the White House trying to argue that the infrastructure bill and Build Back Better will address real public concerns, namely the supply chain disruptions and the inflation that is outpacing wage growth. This is clearly a tendentious, after-the-fact argument.

The White House can hope that the supply chain bottlenecks ease and inflation declines, but Biden's disastrous first year speaks to a more intractable problem with the lackluster occupant of the Oval Office himself.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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Dime Time

In 1931, smack dab at the beginning of the Great Depression (although, when was any depression "great"?), it was a big hit: "Brother Can You Spare a Dime?" Today, 90 years later, what with inflation, the 10 cents of yesteryear has a purchasing power of \$1.82, so the song in 2021 would be "Brother Could You Spare a Buck 82?" It doesn't have the same pizzazz, does it?

John D. Rockefeller used to throw dimes at the crowds he encountered. Rockefeller was the rich guy of his generation, sort of like Donald Trump, except that Rockefeller was successful in business and Trump was a failure in business but was a success in politics, rising to president once ... or twice, if you believe him. As president, in 2017, Donald Trump tossed paper towels at his audience while delivering aid to hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico. He was always that sensitive.

He has been replaced in the White House by Joe Biden, but Biden faces a threat that is known as a saboteur of more than one chief executive: inflation. Rising consumer prices are death to a presidency. Voters don't want to hear about supply chains; they don't even know what a supply chain is, no matter how many times TV news broadcasts the same jammed ships stuck full of cargo containers coming from China. They don't want to hear about the tragic pandemic that also did lasting harm to the world economy and is causing prices to rise to the highest rates in 30 years. They do want someone to blame for the cost of cars, and the gas that powers them, as they head to the grocery store and to shop for the Christmas gifts they can't afford, even online, even misdelivered.

No matter how many jobs the new infrastructure legislation creates, inflation is a politician's nightmare -- that is, for the one who is in office. For the one who is running against the incumbent, it's a dream come true. Joe Biden becomes his or her scapegoat. It's no matter that he's less than a year into office and he has three years to go, the heart of the American electorate is located wherever the wallet is.

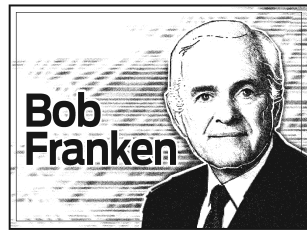
And the spiral of inflation only gets more intense. From a government point of view, acts by Congress or congressional inaction can only make the economy more, uh, depressing. Let's suppose the chicken-playing members of the House and Senate miscalculate, or the administration does, and doesn't pass a raise to the debt ceiling. That will require the United States of America to become a deadbeat in that it is forced to default on its bills. That'll cause inflation to get worse at the same time that production lags because of market forces. Put another way, a supply chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

No matter who is at fault, the president gets the blame. The president is Joe Biden. Even if he stole the election in the grandest of grand larcenies -- as Trump absurdly alleged -- he's still the president and will get the blame.

So, Donald Trump can take his cheap shots as the blamer, and Biden will be the blamee. At least if it's a repeat of the 2020 campaign in 2024. Anyone who holds out hope that Trump's legal problems will overwhelm him, including the charges of direct involvement in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, should not dream that he will face legal accountability. He won't. He can demagogue away any charge, no matter how much evidence exists. Besides, inflation as an issue trumps even treason.

Joe Biden knows, or he should know, that the economy is deadly as a campaign issue, particularly when it comes to eating a rising paycheck. And even if they recede or level off, he does not get credit for it. Joe Biden is caught up in that reality battle where the dime store is replaced by the dollar store. It's made for Donald Trump, whose claim to success is inflating or twisting reality.

Bob Franken is an Emmy Award-winning reporter who covered Washington for more than 20 years with CNN.
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