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Winona Reinsma
Mortgage Professional
t 604-882-3643
f 604-882-2546
e winona.reinsma@verico.ca
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Stress-free Ways to Improve Health

We're regularly flooded with information on the importance of being slender. "Being thin or losing weight is the number one desire of most girls and women because it is associated with being in control, desirable and successful" says Merryl Bear, director of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC).

Despite decades of new nutritional information and diet advice, Canadians today are no thinner than in previous generations. According to a recent report in the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, research consistently shows that only about 5% to 10% of individuals who lose weight by dieting manage to keep it off for more than a year. Worse still, the report shows that dieters are 5 times more likely to develop an eating disorder.

"It's time to stop fear-mongering about those extra pounds, and to value ourselves differently," says Bear.

According to the NEDIC website (www.nedic.ca), better health – and appearance – are often enjoyed by individuals who focus on being well nourished, physically active and socially engaged. The following are some suggestions to help get you there:

- Acknowledge and appreciate what you have achieved in life, big and small.
- Respect and value the natural diversity of human bodies, including your own.
- Be physically active for the pleasure and health benefit it brings.
- Engage in activities that make you feel joyful and purposeful.
- Attend to your emotional, physical and spiritual well-being.
- Bring a sense of enjoyment to food preparation and eating.
- Establish a regular eating pattern and experiment with unfamiliar fruits and vegetables.
- Feel comfortable eating when hungry and refusing food when not hungry, both in your home and others.

These time-honored ways to respect and treat yourself well are a welcome change from all the taboos and punishments associated with over-focusing on weight.

It's never too late to start living well.

(Source: News Canada)

Budgeting for Interest Rate Hikes

Interest rates, near historic lows for much of the past two years, are widely expected to increase through the latter half of 2011. The cost of carrying debt, including mortgages, lines of credit and credit cards, will be affected.

"Low interest rates have enticed many Canadians to spend more on credit," says Stephen Reichenfeld, VP and wealth counselor, Fiduciary Trust Company of Canada. "But an improving economy means lending rates will likely rise. It's important to take steps today and prepare for potential higher borrowing costs in the years to come."

Four steps that can help you prepare to come out ahead:

- Reduce personal debt. Do what you can today to decrease your debt load before borrowing costs increase. Review the option to lock in borrowing costs now and consolidate debt at a lower interest rate. If you're only making minimum payments on your credit cards, start paying more.
- Rethink your mortgage. If you have an adjustable rate mortgage, and you plan to be in your home for at least five years, consider refinancing options such as converting to a fixed rate mortgage at current rates. Speak to your mortgage broker to discuss your options.
- Equity funds. Stocks tend to benefit more than fixed income products like bonds in a rising interest environment. Past market cycles indicates sectors like industrials and technology benefit when interest rates rise.
- Don't hesitate on a major purchase. Consider accelerating your plans to purchase now before interest rates rise. If you're in the market for a new car, there may be zero percent financing and other incentives available. These offers often disappear as rates rise. *(Source: News Canada)*

Plan your finances ahead of time. It's important to take steps today and prepare for higher borrowing costs in the years to come.

Three Last-Minute RRSP Tips

Time is running out to make your RRSP contribution and take advantage of a tax deduction for 2010. With the March 1, 2011 deadline fast approaching, here are three last-minute tips to consider:

1. **Find an advisor**
   Chasing returns or the next big thing can only lead to disappointment. Guidance from an experienced investment advisor will take emotion out of the mix and help you meet your financial goals.
2. **Contribute now**
   Don't worry about how to invest your RRSP contribution. Temporarily park your contribution in a money market fund today and rebalance your portfolio tomorrow.
3. **Diversify, diversify, diversify**
   Canada's equity market represents only about five per cent of the world's entire stock market. It makes sense to diversify your portfolio and invest in global markets. Consider different asset classes too to limit risk.

(Source: News Canada)