



What's your Earth Day wake-up call?

Straight to the heart



As *Natural Health* celebrates 40 years of publication this year, I've been reading through our archives, bound volumes from the '70s and '80s. And a theme is emerging: Some holistic health advice never goes out of style, like choosing organic, pesticide-free foods (I'm reading about the "Dirty Dozen" circa 1997!), the benefits of yoga and meditation, and living mindfully in every moment. Look for our special collectors' issue this summer.

Call it my annual Earth Day wake-up call: Last week, my daughter Maggie and her ninth-grade humanities class watched Irene Salina's 2006 documentary *Flow*, about the dwindling supply of fresh water on our planet. Maggie (who loves a good horror film) told me it was the scariest movie she'd ever seen. "I can't sleep thinking about it. I run around at school turning off faucets and telling friends to stop wasting water. I don't want to take a shower. What are we gonna do?"

It's no secret that I'm proud of my daughters, but this time my chest swelled with more than pride. I, too, was filled with panic. What *are* we going to do?

McKay Jenkins, author of the new book, *What's Gotten Into Us? Staying Healthy in a Toxic World* (Random House), got his own wake-up call, which sparked his book idea. The 48-year-old had a cancer scare during which he was asked in great detail about his lifetime exposure to chemicals. "I used to build fiberglass canoes with my bare hands," he told me, "no face mask, nothing."

After his operation (the tumor was benign), Jenkins decided to look further into the effect of the petrochemicals that all of us are exposed to. His book focuses on a study done with 13 residents in rural Maine who, if anyone should have low levels of chemicals in their bodies, it's them, right?

Wrong. The story that brought me to tears is about Amy Graham, a young mother of two who grew up on a farm and had some of the highest levels of flame retardants in the study. "A particularly troubling finding," Jenkins writes, "given the links found between such compounds and developmental problems in infants—and the fact that they can be passed from mothers to their nursing babies." Graham breastfed both of her daughters, and confesses that she was beginning to worry about the older one's health: "She had food allergies and awful eczema. Her skin was cracked and bleeding" That's where I lost it. How shattering to discover that breastfeeding, the one thing we mothers count on to secure our babies' health, could also be hurting them.

There is a way to be healthy in this world, Jenkins said. "Try to live like your great-grandmother did, using only the products and techniques that were available to her. An iron skillet instead of a Teflon one, for instance. And be *mindful* of what's around you; acting without thinking is the definition of addiction." We've got simple, budget-savvy ways to start; turn to deputy editor Meghan Rabbitt's "The Cheapskate's Guide to a Greener Home," on pg. 58. For other ways to get back to basics, read "Greener Spring Cleaners" on pg. 18 and "Create Less Waste" on pg. 96.

And make a point of examining things. Question that packaging, that nice smell, that glide-on paint. Let your car get dirty. If not for the planet, for your own health. And for our kids'.

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Addicted to kale chips!

Discover my crisp-roasted obsession, along with five other dark, leafy greens recipes.

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You're not your mom

And maybe you aren't doomed to inherit her diseases; learn how to outsmart your genes.

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Hot tamale

Traditional Mexican dishes can be light, fresh and healthful. Get your limes and *cerveza* ready!