

What really kills Caymanians?

Dramatic threats such as hurricanes, terrorism and the bird flu should not lead us to ignore everyday dangers that are much more likely to get us.

■ I cradle the tiny bird as gently as possible. It has been abandoned and its wing is broken, so I'm determined to

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do what I can to help it survive. A week later, however, I'm dead. It turns out that a virus from the bird found its way into my body and killed me. Oops.

■ I'm reading a great book at 30,000 feet and looking forward to arriving at my destination. Without warning, however, a terrorist with a divine mandate detonates his plastic-explosives-filled teeth and kills me. It happens so fast that I don't even have time to sigh.


Call me wild and crazy but I don't lose much sleep over scenarios like those described above. Yes, I try to stay informed about dramatic threats such as terrorism, natural disasters and exotic viruses but I prefer to worry about things that are much more likely to kill me.

I suppose it is just human nature to fear the spectacular and ignore the subtle, regardless of how many more body bags the latter may fill. If one wanders through the African bush at night, for example, horrifying thoughts of being eaten alive by a lion will probably haunt each step. More likely, however, it will be a microscopic virus delivered through a mosquito's schnoz that will do the attacking.


We would all be wise to be aware of this tendency to look for danger in the wrong direction. It is, of course, sensible to take note of all credible threats to our lives

Pop Quiz!


What is more likely to end your life painfully and prematurely?



A. Terrorism



B. Avian Influenza (bird flu)



C. Doughnut (with sprinkles)

Answer: C. Eating too much junk food kills many more people each year than terrorism and Avian flu combined.

and health, but it is a mistake to obsess on a few low-risk dangers while ignoring the high risk ones.

Consider all the noise and excitement about terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. One might think American civilians are being slaughtered by the thousands every day given all the money and attention that nation now dedicates to fighting terrorism. But wouldn't it make sense for them to devote more attention and money to things that kill more Americans than terrorism? The regular flu virus kills 36,000 Americans per year. Approximately 40,000 Americans die in automobile accidents each year. Cigarettes whack a staggering 400,000 Americans every year and obesity claims a similar number of victims annually. If George W. Bush really wants to save as many American lives as possible, he might consider declaring war on public sneezing, tobacco, refined sugar and reckless drivers in addition to terrorism.

Eating your killer. Great-tasting garbage, cleverly packaged and marketed as food, is one of the most common and

deadly health threats in the Cayman Islands. Greasy foods, candy and sugar-filled drinks may be enjoyable but they also slap layers of unhealthy lard upon our bodies. They may even kill us when too much of the stuff is consumed over too many years. It's weird but many of us really do eat our own killers.

The human mind naturally lusts for sugary high-fat foods and the food industry is eager to sell them to us. It's a bad combination and, according to the death toll in developed nations, it's a bigger threat to us than all that scary stuff they show on the evening news. Stop obsessing over al Qaeda, hurricanes and bizarre diseases and start worrying about that poison crud on your plate that you call a meal.

On any given day, George Town Hospital doesn't see many people who were injured by terrorists or infected with the Ebola virus. They do, however, do a brisk business in treating people who made bad choices in what they ate, drank and inhaled over many years. Based on the stats, we should fear Twinkies far more than suicide

bombers. Stay vigilant, for those Skittles in your cupboard are much closer to you than a sick duck in Kowloon.

Poison in the air kills 3 million people worldwide each year (World Health Organization). Caymanians come in contact with a high number of toxic chemicals, airborne and otherwise, at work, at home, at school, and even in the womb. Some of these substances potentially can cause cancer years down the road. We should not allow ourselves to be uninformed or passive just because some threats are quiet, invisible and not immediately harmful. As a society, are we worried enough about toxins in our environment?

Yes, some very bad and very dramatic things are lurking out there in our world and we can't ignore them. But let's make sure we don't forget that a few bad things are right here too. They are in our homes, stalking us right now.

A seductive cigarette, a merciless candy bar and a psychopathic hamburger may be sneaking up on you right now—and they mean to kill.