

check, which requires blood to be drawn, is unpleasant. So while our long-term health and longevity depend on undergoing such tests, in the short term we procrastinate and procrastinate and procrastinate.

But can you imagine if we all got the required health exams on time? Think how many serious health problems could be caught if they were diagnosed early. Think how much cost could be cut from health-care spending, and how much misery would be saved in the process.

So how do we fix this problem? Well, we could have a dictatorial solution, in which the state (in the Orwellian sense) would dictate our regular checkups. That approach worked well with my students, who were given a deadline and performed well. In society, no doubt, we would all be healthier if the health police arrived in a van and took procrastinators to the ministry of cholesterol control for blood tests.

This may seem extreme, but think of the other dictates that society imposes on us for our own good. We may receive tickets for jaywalking, and for having our seat belts unsecured. No one thought 20 years ago that smoking would be banned in most public buildings across America, as well as in restaurants and bars, but today it is—with a hefty fine incurred for lighting up. And now we have the movement against trans fats. Should people be deprived of heart-clogging french fries?

Sometimes we strongly support regulations that restrain our self-destructive behaviors, and at other times we have equally strong feelings about our personal freedom. Either way, it's always a trade-off.

But if mandatory health checkups won't be accepted by the public, what about a middle ground, like the self-imposed deadlines I gave to Gaurav and his classmates (the deadlines