

## Can you find 30 minutes a day to improve your quality of life?

In the scheme of things, half an hour a day is a small amount of time to dedicate to any one person's overall health. But for doctors specifically, who are usually pressed for time, I know finding these 30 minutes can be a challenge.

Granted, physicians are extremely busy most waking hours of the day. I know that physicians of my generation aren't as adept at balancing the work-life ratio as our younger colleagues. In my day, we did the early rounds in hospital, worked in the office later than we would have wanted, completed paperwork and phone calls after hours, and were lucky to make it home for dinner by 8 p.m. And for those of us that delivered babies or were on call, it was difficult to plan anything, let alone time to exercise. I am thankful that the younger generation of physicians is making an effort to lead a more balanced life.

Scheduling an exercise regimen into your lifestyle is something that every person—doctors included, younger or older, moms or dads, students, residents, or fully practising physicians—should do. Mounting research shows that sedentary behavior is a powerful predictor of ill health. The benefits of regular physical activity are well documented, so I'm certainly not going to pontificate them here. But keep in mind, the physical and mental advantages of being active on a regular basis are hard to ignore, and yours for the taking regardless of physical ability. A physician in a US study presented to the American Heart Association meeting last year said she exercises to reduce her stress.<sup>1</sup> She finds she's a much better wife, mother, and physician when she's de-stressed than if she had worked another 30 minutes in the office.

Aside from the personal benefits of being physically active, numerous studies show that active physicians are more likely to prescribe an exercise regimen to their patients than those who are more sedentary. For one thing, physically active physicians have this in the forefront of their minds when counseling patients. When people feel good about their lifestyle, they are more likely to share it with others. Conversely, inactive physicians who would like to counsel their patients to become more physically active may feel somewhat hypocritical.

Generally speaking, doctors feel they should practise what they preach. In the words of physician and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Albert Schweitzer, "Example is not the main thing influencing others. It is the only thing."

A study published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* finds that most British doctors don't get enough exercise. In this study, nearly 80% of doctors fell short of daily exercise requirements.<sup>2</sup> The American Heart Association study surveyed American doctors about their general lifestyle habits and how likely they were to recommend a lifestyle change to their patients.<sup>1</sup> In this study, 73% of physicians didn't get enough exercise. Research showed that physicians who exercised more than five times a week were likely to recommend a healthy lifestyle to their patients 75% of the time. Physicians who didn't exercise at all were likely to make that same recommendation just 51% of the time.

Looking at this from the patient perspective, evidence indicates that nearly two-thirds of patients would be more willing to become physically active if their doctors advise it. As well, patients find this type of advice coming from their active, healthy doc-

tor more motivating and credible.

For those of you thinking about including physical activity into your daily routines, physicians who exercise on a regular basis advise that you start out slowly and gradually increase; try to do something 30 minutes most days; always warm up, stretch, and cool down after each activity; keep track of your activities; set goals; and most important, choose an activity you enjoy (otherwise it won't last). The American Medical Association has posted *A Physician's Guide to Personal Health* online, and it is a good resource.<sup>3</sup> You might want to start with the annual Walk With Your Doc event scheduled for this May. Information is at [www.bcma.org](http://www.bcma.org).

The way I look at it, if President Obama can schedule time to exercise on a regular basis, surely the rest of us can.

—Shelley Ross, MD  
President

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### References

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