



Exercise

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Welcome to this podcast by Doctor's Digest, bridging the gap between the business of medicine and the practice of medicine, with single-topic manuals that provide practice solutions from the experts.

Although we're all familiar with the health benefits, exercise is a hard sell within the physician community. There's just not enough time in the day for it, we tell ourselves with a shrug, and we let it go at that. But there are ways that you can fit exercise into your daily routine no matter how busy you are, if you just make up your mind to do it. After all, it's completely up to you; your patients are never going to say to you, "Please go to the gym this afternoon, doctor—I'll be happy to wait until you get back."

One way to make the commitment easier from the start is to choose an exercise that you know you are going to enjoy. If you don't like to run, don't run. Swim, cycle, or rollerblade instead. If you do pick an activity that you like, you'll be more likely to engage in it week after week—you'll even look forward to it.

Another suggestion from the experts is to keep an exercise log from the start. This log can be a real confidence booster when you see how far you've come. Even if you haven't made as much progress as you'd like, a little guilt can act as a powerful motivator for you to run that extra quarter-of-a-mile or swim those two extra laps.

But even if you're gym-phobic, there are plenty of small activities throughout the day that you can perform to help you get into better shape. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, for example. Or park your car a little farther from your office's front door.

If you can't squeeze in a full forty minutes of exercise, then work out for ten minutes at a time, or whatever you can spare. But try to do it regularly. Exercise should not be a day-to-day decision, but a lifelong commitment.

Some physicians benefit from finding a workout buddy, a friend or colleague who can become part of the exercise routine. Not only will this kind of sharing make the exercise more enjoyable for you; it will also make you more committed to honor your appointments at the gym.

In addition, consider hiring a trainer. Paying a professional, even for a few weeks, will add value to the activity and encourage your commitment to establish exercise as a regular habit.

Another hint from the experts is to develop a backup plan. Physicians hate to waste time. So plan which alternate machine you are going to use if someone else is working on the one you need. Having two different exercise plans will enable you to shift into alternate mode whenever you need to.

If you haven't exercised for a while, be sensible about it. Don't try to commit yourself to an unrealistic schedule at the gym; start small. Thirty minutes of aerobics three times a week, and monitoring your heart rate each day, can give you a useful baseline. Then, after three or

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four weeks, increase the duration of your activity, but by no more than ten percent a week. At this point you might cross-train into light weightlifting to adapt your muscles to new stresses, to prevent injury, and to keep your muscles toned.

Once you've established a regular schedule, don't fall into the habit of doing the same exercises week after week, month after month. A common mistake is not extending yourself beyond that daily routine. If you don't add some variety, your body will quickly adapt to any given level of exercise, and it will take more and different activities to get your heart rate up and burn extra calories.

Finally, reward yourself for doing your exercise. If you manage to honor your goals, treat yourself to something special at the end of each week or month. This, too, can enhance your motivation.

And by the way, when you exercise, you're not the only one who benefits. Keep in mind that a doctor who exercises in public is actually performing a great service for his community because you're showing your patients that you're putting your money where your mouth is. Seeing one's own doctor jogging around town or lifting weights at the local gym is a great motivator to get moving and focus on a healthier lifestyle.

Be sure to check with your personal physician before starting an exercise program.

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