

Simple steps toward better health and fitness

We've all done it at some point. We made a decision to get in better shape, but for one reason or another, it just never happened. Maybe you joined a health club, and after 30 days, you just couldn't find the time to go. Or you bought a treadmill for your home, and six months later it was used more as a place to hang your clothes at the end of the day than for exercise. Maybe you started the latest fad diet, experienced some early success, and then found yourself back to your old eating habits. Whatever the failed effort looks like, it's a story we all share. It seems that as hard as it is to start a health and fitness program, it's even harder to stick with it.

The State Bar's Wellness Committee was created to promote and encourage healthy living and regular exercise amongst judges, lawyers, their staffs and law students. But let's face it – we're all busy all the time. We live life at such a hurried pace that we have little extra time in our daily routines. So how do we juggle the demands of family life, a career in law, community involvement and still find time for exercise and a healthy lifestyle? Here are some simple steps to help you get started in a health and fitness lifestyle that you can stick with.

FIT TO PRACTICE



Fit to Practice

ing crunch exercises, *great*, go for it! But the most important decision you can make when starting to exercise is to choose an activity that you enjoy. There are as many forms of exercise available as there are reasons to exercise. Just a short list includes swimming, bicycling, walking, weight training, racquetball, aerobics, running, yoga, martial arts and an almost endless variety of exercise opportunities available through your local health club. You can also find some great exercise programs on DVD that you can use in your home. If you choose an exercise activity that you enjoy, you are much more likely to remain committed to your fitness program. Over time, you may find other activities that you enjoy that you can add to your fitness routines that will keep you interested and coming back for more.

2. Set realistic goals

There are many good reasons to set goals as part of any health and fitness program. Setting goals helps us keep track of where we have been and where we want to go. Striving to attain our goals can help keep us motivated, challenged and invested in our fitness program. Goals give us something to work toward, an accomplishment we can be proud of. But it's also important that we set goals that are realistic and something that, with hard work and commitment, we can achieve.

For example, if you decide that your fitness program is going to include running, it's probably not a good idea to set a goal of completing a 26.2-mile marathon during the first three months. If weight training is part of your fitness regimen, and your goal is to increase your bench press by 75 pounds in 30 days, you have no realistic chance of meeting that goal. And it's not even a healthy goal to attempt to lose 50 pounds in one month. Not only are these goals unrealistic, but when we fail to meet them, disappointment and discouragement can set in, and many people walk away from their fitness efforts.

So it's important to set goals that will challenge you, yet be obtainable. I would suggest setting both short-term and long-term goals. Add an extra mile to your run every couple weeks. Put an extra 10 pounds on your bench press every few weeks or increase your reps every couple weeks. Aim for losing 1/2 to 1 pound of weight each week. When you set and achieve realistic short-term goals, before long you will find yourself accomplishing your long-term goals, and that marathon will become a reality.

3. Commit to consistency

When our car ages and starts to rack up the miles, we simply trade it in on a new model with no miles. Unfortunately, we can't do that with our bodies or our health. Our best and only option is to take care of our bodies along the way. While hit-and-miss, stop-and-start exercise is better than none at all, consistency is the key to long-term fitness. We all make excuses for why we don't have time to exercise, but let's face it – we make time to do the things that are most important to us. Consistent exercise will result

1. Get moving

Find a physical activity that you enjoy that will get you off the couch and moving. Too many people believe that exercising means banging out mile after monotonous mile on a treadmill or performing crunches until their back hurts. If you enjoy running (or walking) on a treadmill or perform-



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in feeling better, looking better and having more confidence, not to mention the long-term health benefit of regular exercise. With each of those positive results will come an increased desire to exercise and stay fit. The more consistent you are, the better your results, and the better the results, the more you'll want to exercise. So make a commitment to a regular schedule of exercise – every other day, two times a week or even once a week to get you started. Then stick with your schedule and make your workouts a priority. You will likely find that very soon you'll be adding more workouts to your week.

4. Reconsider your nutrition

During the holidays I often hear people express concern over what they eat between Christmas and New Year's Day. I think the bigger concern should be what we eat between New Year's Day and Christmas. The modern American diet consists primarily of processed and heavily refined foods that are almost void of nutritional value. Among the biggest culprits in our food that have high-jacked our

health are out-of-control amounts of refined sugars, trans fat, saturated fat and high-fructose corn syrup. Consumption of foods containing these menaces contributes to cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, fatigue and a number of other serious health problems. As long as we continue consuming large quantities of these types of foods, our health and fitness will suffer greatly.

I am not suggesting a particular diet plan – although I am sure there are a number of healthy diet plans available. What I am advocating is quite simple: that we start to make better choices at the dinner table. Lean meats that are high in protein and low in fat such as chicken, turkey, venison and fish need to find their way onto the center of our plate. We need to limit our intake of simple carbohydrate foods such as table sugar, baked goods made with white flour, candy, white flour pasta and most breakfast cereals, and begin consuming more foods containing complex carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain

bread, brown rice, oatmeal, potatoes and low-fat yogurt.

And we should seek to minimize our consumption of soft drinks, alcohol, fruit drinks and beverages containing corn syrups while increasing our consumption of water, skim milk and green tea. While there is much more you can do to eat healthy, these are just some suggestions to get you started. And getting started is the point here. Adopt healthier eating patterns slowly because trying to change years of poor eating habits overnight usually comes with little success. But start by committing yourself to be more aware of what you are consuming and the effects, positive or negative, your choices have on your health and fitness.

If you still want more guidance in getting started toward better fitness and nutrition, you can consult with a fitness trainer at your local health club as well as a nutritionist in your community. And it's always a good idea to consult your physician prior to starting an exercise program or making changes in your nutrition. But I'm confident that your physician will be your greatest encourager.

There are no hidden secrets to better fitness and nutrition. Much of it is common sense. But by following these few simple steps, you can quickly be on your way toward an active and healthy lifestyle that will improve your health, fitness and overall quality of life. And remember this: Whether you think you can or can't, either way, you're right. Best wishes in the pursuit. 🍷