



For you, your career, and your life

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# Taking Your Own Advice: Healthy Habits for Busy Physicians

Are you practicing the same health habits you preach to your patients? Or is that one more thing you've put off until after your residency?

Using a practical approach, other busy physicians have successfully improved their health and stress resistance. They share some tips you can put to use right away.

"Being a resident is just about the most challenging time in your career," says John Whitcomb, MD, director for patient access at Aurora Health Care, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "Even if you are limited to the total number of hours you may work each week, you aren't restricted to the amount of information you have to absorb."

"Some of the very best information of all is how to keep

yourself optimally well during times of immense stress," Whitcomb notes. "Yet that wasn't taught to you when you were in training."

Whitcomb offers these tips for keeping yourself well when you can't afford to miss a minute of work.

### 30-Second Stress Buster

First of all, start with a methodology to uncork stress when you feel in a tight spot. I call it the "Half Minute Mantra." This method turns on your parasympathetic system and regulates your stress response. Close your eyes for a few seconds and visualize your favorite friend, food, place or event. While thinking about that, make yourself smile as you let those feelings fill you. Take three long, slow, deep breaths. Then go back to the work at hand. You will be calmer, more creative and in control.

### Choose Good Food

There is increasing evidence that some foods turn on your internal inflammatory responses. Sugar and saturated fats are the chief enemies. Instead of choosing sugar-loaded snacks, plan ahead to eat well all day long. A good place

*"Maybe later." Is that how you respond when someone asks you to go to the gym, take a walk or share a few minutes of down time? How can you possibly fit one more thing into an already overbooked schedule? When the demands of residency cause you to defer activities that could help you maintain a healthy mind and body, your Resident Assistance Program can help. RAP is your resource for improving your ability to excel as a physician and a leader. Call us at 813-870-3344.*



to start is with the foundation of our best evidence-based diet. The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet can lower blood pressure and help keep your metabolism tuned. (The DASH diet is based on an eating plan rich in fruits and vegetables, and low-fat or non-fat dairy products.)

Eat 8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Find a place to store some fresh fruit, so when you crave a snack, you can choose an apple, a bag of cherries or some ripe plums. Snow peas, edamame, and baby carrots make good snacks too.

### Realistic Exercise Strategies

You just have to find a way to get some exercise. When you drive to work, park far away and walk 15 minutes. It feels like a pain at first, but it builds in fresh air, some time to yourself, and gets you to the minimum threshold of exercise. The Harvard professionals study shows that one of the strategies to cut heart disease by 87% is to exercise every day for 30 minutes.



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## Money Matters

### Protecting Your Money and Your Time

If you've ever had to deal with persistent telemarketers, unsatisfactory service from a bank, car dealer or repair shop, you know how much time and money it can cost to set things right. The Division of Consumer Services within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearing-house for consumer complaints. It is a resource for information, protection and complaints, regardless of whether the department regulates that particular industry.

Last year, the department received 37,227 total complaints. Every year, Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson releases the top ten list of complaints to ensure consumers know where the biggest problem areas lie and can take steps to protect themselves.

While the department provided more than \$7.6 million in refunds in the form of cash, goods and services last year, it works to educate consumers so they can avoid problems in the first place. "It is stressful and time consuming for the public to take action against a business," said Bronson. "Knowing the pitfalls can help people make educated decisions in all aspects of their daily lives."

#### Top Consumer Complaints for 2008

1. Do Not Call List Violations
2. Travel/Vacation Plans
3. Telemarketers (unrelated to Do Not Call list)
4. Credit/Banking
5. Communications
6. Price Gouging
7. Motor Vehicle Sales
8. Motor Vehicle Repairs
9. Landlord/Tenant Issues
10. Construction Issues

To learn more before you transact business or to file a consumer complaint, go to [www.800helpfla.com](http://www.800helpfla.com)

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## Making Time for a Healthier Lifestyle, *continued*

Walking is the minimum. Recent research suggests it doesn't have to be all at once. Three minutes ten times a day will do. Take the stairs. Ten flights a day is a pretty good target.

### Minimize Risks

You can cut your risks of colds by some 50% by never touching your eyes with unwashed hands. Your patients are sick and you work in a public place. So get in the habit of washing your hands a lot.

Keep your immune system in tip-top shape by taking vitamin D every day. Working indoors all the time, even in a sunny climate, you may not be getting enough vitamin D. A recent review from the Archives of Internal Medicine shows that people with low levels of D have 25% more colds than folks with higher D levels.

### Feed Your Brain

Your brain works best if it has the ingredients it takes to make it grow. You need omega fatty acids every day. Eat fish whenever you have a choice. Try to include nuts and flax seed in your diet. Take fish oil capsules daily.

### Make Time for Friends

Remember your friends. You will make lifelong friendships during this time of your life. Cherish those connections. Start a gourmet club, go to a movie or the beach, or have a barbeque. Invest in your friends. Your soul needs the laughter, the support and the connections.

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### Resources:

- DASH Diet <http://dashdiet.org/>
- Health Professionals Follow-Up Study, Harvard School of Public Health [www.hsph.harvard.edu/hpfs/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hpfs/)
- State-of-the-Art Paper <http://content.onlinejacc.org/cgi/content/abstract/51/3/249>
- American Heart Association—Healthy lifestyle resources including risk assessment and tracking tools: [www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3006028](http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3006028)

### Q & A: Cardiologist Takes Action

Thomas E. Kottke, MD, MSPH, is Medical Director for Evidence-based Health at HealthPartners serving Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota and Western Wisconsin. He made lifestyle changes that resulted in weight loss and improved his overall health. He shares his personal health improvement success story.

**Q:** What triggered the change in your health habits?

**A:** After about 20 years in practice, I realized that I was getting a belly. I wanted to be the examiner, not the examinee, in the cardiology exam room.

**Q:** What barriers did you overcome?

**A:** Mindless eating, particularly snacking. When I look at food now, I ask myself why I am considering eating it. If it isn't on my nutrition plan, I don't eat it.

**Q:** How did you monitor your progress and stay motivated?

**A:** I followed my weight daily, kept a physical activity log and set dietary goals.

**Q:** What might busy medical residents learn from your success?

**A:** With self-monitoring, it is possible to maintain an optimal lifestyle.