



Fitting fitness into the legal balance

We all subscribe to the notion that physical activity is an important component of health and wellness. But too few of us put that thought into action.

The cost of inactivity – to us individually and to the economy – is significant. Beyond simply relieving stress, regular exercise reduces the risk of health risks such as heart disease, falls and injuries, obesity, high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression, colon cancer and premature death. Research published in the November issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal concluded that illness due to physical inactivity costs the Canadian health care system at least \$2.1 billion annually in direct health care costs.

According to the Canadian Fitness and Health Research Institute, a majority of Ontarians don't exercise enough. Our most common excuses?

- Lack of time – 76 per cent;
- Lack of energy – 66 per cent;
- Lack of interest or motivation – 63 per cent;

For lawyers, these issues can be even greater barriers, given the demands of a legal career.

No one knows that better than Winnie Talan, an award-winning fitness professional with a distinctive background: A group fitness leader and a personal trainer, she is also an Osgoode Hall graduate (LL.B. in 1993).

She began working as a fitness instructor while doing her undergraduate degree, and on graduating from law school, Winnie decided to take some time to explore a career in fitness. In addition to having worked as a group exercise manager at the Sports Club of Canada's Parkview Club, she also recruits group exercise instructors for the Sports Clubs of Canada, teaches certification courses through Can-Fit PRO, and is an instructor in the Fitness and Health Promotion Diploma program at Humber College.

LAWPRO Magazine interviewed Winnie on the job.

Why do we all need to work out?

You need to remember to look at the big picture: it's great to have a successful career, but you need to take care of yourself as well. We take the simple things for granted, such as walking to the corner store, or playing with our grandkids. But if you don't take care of your body today, you won't be able to do those things when you're older.

Too often it takes something drastic – such as a health scare or the sudden death of someone you know – to get us motivated. Health and well-being go hand in hand with keeping yourself mentally stimulated. You can't just focus on one aspect of your life.

How do you make fitness part of your lifestyle?

It really depends on your personality style. If you're a scheduler, it just needs to be scheduled. Put it in your dayplanner and make sure you keep your regular session. Personal training can be an excellent option, it costs money, so you feel it if you miss a session.

Type A personalities live by being accountable and taking responsibility for their actions. They're usually goal-oriented and self-motivated, so they should really focus on making a personal commitment to themselves by writing down their fitness goals and planning a strategy to achieve them.

If you're a litigator or someone who thrives off competition, join a squash league. Playing against others offers that level of competition – it provides an outlet for that competitive energy that's physical rather than professional.

If you're more of a private person, you have to be disciplined enough to give yourself some time. You have to be able to say, "I gave 10 hours at the office, I can have one hour for me." Lawyers are famous for being married to the job, they can just work and work. At some point you have to be able to shut that off and just do something for yourself.

Many people enjoy the social aspect of joining a gym: Fitness classes are very social, you see all the regulars, they give you a chance to be away from other lawyers for a change. Others might have a lunch time walking or running group, or they may want to join a gym with a buddy.

Often people will adopt a fitness routine and get discouraged and quit a short while later. What do you recommend to keep them motivated?

Often a support system is the best motivator. When you join a gym, there are trainers, class instructors and other people around you. When you work out with a trainer, he or she is often your best support system, teaching you and encouraging you. Get someone at work who will commit with you, someone who will work out with you. A bit of peer pressure can be great motivation. Many office workers do a group power walk at lunch, and the guilt of not showing up is often enough to keep the group going. It's the same with joining a sports league: You have to be there at a specific time, you know you have others expecting and even depending on you. For a competitive person, the worst thing is to lose by default.

We all know we need to be more active and eat better. Keep going to the gym, hang in there for two or three weeks, you won't see rewards right away. You have to remember it's a long-term process, you won't see an immediate payoff.

What do you say to those who say they are too busy to exercise?

You don't necessarily have to make extra time for exercise. We encourage people to incorporate exercise into their lives by adopting an active lifestyle. When managing your time is important, you can easily do more stretching and less sitting, and walk to get more cardio into your daily routine. Everyone has 24 hours in a day. All the small things you do add up, incrementally.

A good resources is Canada's Physical Activity Guide (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html). The basic principle behind it is to get the body to do 60 minutes of activity



per day. For example, walking the dog, walking to the store, gardening, light housework. You can walk on the golf course instead of using a cart. Park at the parking lot exit at the shopping mall instead of close to the mall entrance. Get off the bus or subway a few stops early. Play with your kids at the playground. Even taking a walk after supper will do you a world of good. What you're doing for your body is worth the extra time.

What are fitness trends that lawyers can adopt into their routines?

Like the rest of the population, lawyers are getting older. In the 1980s, fitness was very body-oriented, people worked hard, trained hard and played hard. Today, 25 years later, the same people are in their fifties, and mind/body style classes such as yoga or Pilates are popular. The focus is now on total body balance, there's an awareness that the mind and body are related. Fitness consumers are more educated. Beyond wanting to look good, they realize that there are health and well-being benefits.

We now view fitness as a journey of the mind: Pilates, spinning and yoga all go along with that, there's a huge interest in those forms of fitness. We're more aware of functional training, which is about teaching the body to do what it does in real life. Functional training is less machine-oriented: You mimic actions from daily life such as lifting boxes, shoveling snow, or

movements from sports. It appeals to clients on an intellectual level as it results in better performance of one's movements and actions in real life. Today's trainers are more able to adapt to different strategies and take an individual approach that works with each client.

What can law firms do to encourage their employees to be more active?

Keeping your people healthy is worth the up-front investment. Many companies participate in challenges or charity runs. It just takes one person to arrange a corporate team. That way you get people who are new to fitness participating in a non-threatening environment. Many workplaces subsidize corporate gym memberships or have on-site facilities. The Canadian Council for Health & Active Living at Work has a comprehensive guide to implementing active living programs in the workplace called 'Making it Work' (cchalw-ccsvat.ca/english/), which offers lots of practical advice.

Ultimately, you have to have a desire from within. It's never too late: You're never too old to start. Later on in life, you'll really reap the benefits: Regular exercise can improve your quality of life and help you live longer. Ask yourself, "Do I want to be able to play with my grandkids?" Feeling fulfilled through your career is great, but you can't forget to take care of your body too.