

Getting the exercise habit often takes extra planning

**“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch**

Let's see...Monday I have meetings all day Tuesday I'll be desk-bound with computer and paper work, and Wednesday I leave for a conference in Spokane for three days. This is a fairly typical work week for me and I don't even want to add up the amount of time I'll be sitting during a week like this. Inactivity is built in to my job, just as it is for many of you. Building in a healthy amount of physical activity takes considerable planning and effort most weeks.

For those of you who have been following this column, you know that I am an avid (maybe even a little compulsive) exerciser. I admit that when I was younger I would get discouraged easily when I couldn't make time to get in a good walk or workout every day. Now, when I see a week ahead with hours and hours of sitting, I get busy planning how and when I can fit in any kind of activity or exercise.

I've developed several strategies to make sure my level of activity and exercise is going to be satisfying when faced with a schedule like the one I described above. Over the years I've learned to look at the big picture of the week. If I just can't fit in activity for one or two days, I plan to put in extra time somewhere else to meet my goal over a whole week instead of day by day.

On the days I can't fit in exercise I realize that any movement is better than no movement at all. I truly believe that it all adds up. Working a desk job means that I am at my computer or on the phone most of my day. I have to constantly remind myself to get up from my desk and walk to another area of the building to talk to a co-worker instead of relying on the phone or e-mail for communication. Fortunately, I have a private office so when on a long conference call I use the speaker and pace around my conference table.

Taking the stairs is an obsession for me. I always try to locate stairs at a hotel and request that they be unlocked so I can walk between floors instead of taking the elevator. Meeting breaks are an opportunity to find the restroom furthest away from the meeting room and lunch breaks can include time for a quick walk. I even find that standing up for portions of meetings helps. I know when I am sitting in meetings all day my body sure appreciates intermittent movement.

Don't dismiss the benefit of some of these short bouts of exercise. More and more studies are pointing to the fact that even three 10 minutes bouts of exercise can have the same health benefits that one 30 minute session can have.

Occasionally I get to the end of a busy week and find that I just wasn't able to fit in enough active time. That will usually find me scheduling a long weekend walk with a friend, my daughter, Katy, or our dog to make up the deficit. I do enjoy looking back at a week and realizing that my attention and planning paid off and I was able to get in a total of 4-7 hours of exercise over the entire seven days.

Out of curiosity, I asked a few avid exercisers from around the Harbor

what they do to fit in activity when they know that they will be pressed for time. Here are some of the responses I got:

Ron Rogers, a chiropractor, thespian and community volunteer from Ocean Shores tries to avoid getting pressed for time. "What works for me is to schedule exercise into my day like any other appointment. That way I know that I will always have time for it."

Marilyn Lewis works at Grays Harbor County Management Services in Montesano and likes to get to the gym 3-4 times per week. If she knows she won't be able to make her usual time after work she'll try to fit a work-out in on her lunch hour or even get up earlier and exercise in the morning. "You have to allow for flexibility in your routine. I find that if I miss a week of working out it's like starting over. Consistency is the key, even if it means missing that extra hour of sleep!"

April Heikkila of Aberdeen balances her day between family, her work as the director of the Harbor After-School Program and her job as a swim coach for Aberdeen High School. Although she usually takes advantage of the child care services at the YMCA while she enjoys her workout, sometimes getting there is not always possible. "I can exercise at home with a jump rope or take the kids to the school and while they are playing I can use the monkey bars for some strength training or do some abdominal work on the slide. Sometimes you just have to be creative and know that any movement is good."

So, you see, lots of us experience the burden of being overscheduled. How we choose to respond to it makes a world of difference. For all of you out there who think it's easier to just not worry about it (but really do), try some of the techniques that work for other people

and see what works for you. I bet if you put your mind to it you can make more time in your day or week than you realize. If you are still not convinced that short bouts make a difference, have your co-workers or family be the judge. For many of us, exercise balances our moods and makes us more agreeable to be around. Whenever I exhibit some out-of-sorts behavior my family all tell me "go for a walk!". If you find that you are getting cranky, short-fused, losing focus or getting tired during the day, take a break and do a power walk. My bet is that you will feel much better and your brain will be able to function better as well. In fact, make it a habit – at least once a day take a walk on your break whether you need it or not! Exercise can be habit forming and the way I see it, that's a good thing!

Maryann Welch is the director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.gphss.org.