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Get Moving

Stouffville doctor's prescription for health

By Ruth Patterson

In the new year, we make promises to eat less, sit less and exercise more. But by the time March rolls around, most people have gone back to the sedentary life.

Unfortunately, human bodies were not designed to be sedentary. Our growing reluctance to engage in physical activity is making us unhealthy. A New York Times article noted that Americans are suffering from an acute case of 'outdoor deprivation disorder,' where use of electronic media has resulted in a lack of outdoor physical activity and 'a growing disconnect with our natural environment.'

According to Health Canada, Canadians are not far behind, with more diseases of indoor living, such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, asthma, ADHD, osteoporosis, stress and depression. The good news is that only 30 minutes of walking or physical activity a day, five times a week, can cut our risk of developing a chronic illness by 50 per cent.

So why aren't more of us doing it? Research cited in a Toronto Star article last spring showed that written, explicit 'prescriptions for exercise' including 'dosage, type and frequency' proved far more effective than generic advice.

It isn't good enough to know that we should exercise. We need someone in authority to get us going, monitor our progress, encourage us and remind us of the consequences of not being active. This is where Dr. Yasmin Ladak of the Stouffville Medical Centre comes in.

Dr. Ladak not only talks the talk about exercise as preventative medicine, she has also walked the

walk with patients. She is part of a new movement among physicians, researchers and public health experts to start assessing and treating patients' physical activity levels as routinely as checking their blood pressure and pulse.

In the spring of 2011, she started a Walk-Fit Challenge to encourage patients to start walking regularly to improve their health. "I wanted to do more to motivate and challenge our patients to get more active and moving," she said. By getting her colleagues to join her in practising what they preach, she initiated an eight week program and purchased pedometers to monitor progress.

Patients, staff and physicians were all encouraged to walk as much as possible, with a goal of 10,000 steps a day. Patients were weighed in at the beginning and end of the program, and Dr. Ladak offered walking groups during the week. To start the program, she held a seminar with a personal trainer, who demonstrated walking as a low impact, weight bearing exercise.

When she went on

maternity leave, she referred patients to Barb Armstrong, fitness supervisor at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Leisure Centre. Barb and her staff have started a new program, Exercise is Medicine, for residents living with or at risk of chronic health problems.

Dr. Ladak, who enjoys walking, bicycling and running with her husband Jeff, and now baby Noah, is a staunch advocate of walking for physical and mental health. "Walking is such an easy, inexpensive, healthy, and social activity, anyone can do it and they can start any time," she said.

"It takes no special equipment, it's a lot of fun, it helps us all feel and look better, and if it becomes a habit, it will prevent inactivity and obesity." Dr. Ladak hopes to make the medical centre's motivational walking program an annual spring event.

This year, why not have your family write out and sign their own daily walking prescription for health? You can walk in a local park, visit Main Street, tour our regional forests and hiking trails, explore our architectural heritage, or discover the wonderful walking and cycling paths of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

For more information about local guided walking and hiking, contact the Oak Ridges Trail Association (ORTA) at info@oakridgestrail.org or www.oakridgestrail.org. ORTA walks are listed in the Stouffville Free Press community events calendar. For the Exercise is Medicine program and other fitness programs at the leisure centre, contact Barb Armstrong at 905-642-7529 ext. 319, or send an email to barb.armstrong@townofws.ca.



Dr. Yasmin Ladak of the Stouffville Medical Centre inspires patients to get active.

Taoist Tai Chi To Host Open House

Local Tai Chi practitioners hone their skills at the 2011 Strawberry Festival. Markham-Stouffville's Fung Loy Kok Taoist Tai Chi society's location will hold an open house Feb. 4 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. and Feb. 6 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome to drop by, learn more about Tai Chi, and give it a try. The society is at 124 Dickson Hill Rd., on the east side of Hwy. 47, north of 19th Ave. Call 905-640-0117 for details.

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