

Six-minute marathon fitting for man with rare disease

BY ALI RAZA
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Stouffville's Jim Gillies, 69, will walk a "six-minute marathon" on Saturday to raise awareness for Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF) – a disease he's had for the last three years.

"IPF has been known for quite a while as an orphan disease, meaning few Canadians have it," Gillies said. "So big pharma just hasn't got to it yet, but statistics show that the death rate from IPF is the same as cervical cancer in women."

"I believe, and my doctor believes, there needs to be awareness of the disease, that's basically what I'm trying to do," he added.

Pulmonary fibrosis affects an estimated 30,000 Canadians and is responsible for 5,000 deaths each year.

Pulmonologists commonly use a six-minute walking test to assess the prevalence of IPF

and monitor the progression of the disease.

"They get you to walk as fast as you can, up and down a hallway in the hospital, with some electronic gear attached to you so they can read things like oxygen levels and lung capacity," Gillies said.

"It's a standard test that baselines every patient, that's why the six-minute walk became part of a marathon."

To some people with severe IPF, a six-minute walk is exceedingly difficult to do.

This month, Canadians with IPF from coast to coast are participating in various "six-minute marathons" to put IPF in the spotlight and to show they can still live an active life with the rare but fatal lung disease.

The disease causes irreversible scarring of the lungs which worsens over time. The scarred lungs make it difficult to receive an

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