

Aim for 150 minutes physical activity a week. That's the latest call to fitness by Health Promotion Board (HPB). Play soccer, climb the stairs, brisk walk, do taichi or qigong, mop the floor, lift weights, carry your groceries...nothing too hard to handle, right? But you've got to make a conscious effort to get moving, going and doing to hit that goal of 150 minutes. It's simply too easy to plonk your sorry self in front of the telly or computer and remain glued to your seat for hours on end.

HPB has been working hard to prevent and control obesity over the years, but our country still faces an escalating trend of overweight, obesity, and associated diseases. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2004, almost half (49.3 percent) of adult Singaporeans eat out at hawker centers six or more times per week. A greater proportion of adult Singaporeans, from 31.8 percent in 1998 to 48.2 percent in 2004, exceed their daily energy intake. This increase can be attributed to larger portions of meals and increased frequency of snacking.

And when heavy and hectic schedules leave working adults with little or no time for exercise, it is no surprise then that only 21.2 percent of working Singaporeans 18-69 years of age exercised regularly, compared to 24.9 percent of the general population (National Health Survey 2004).

Before I turned 40, I was every healthcare professional's nightmare. My multiple press deadlines kept me up during the witching hours of the night and I survived on barely four hours of sleep daily. I skipped breakfast and often forgot to eat lunch till it was way past 3pm and made up for the starvation with a heavy dinner, sometimes supper. My metabolic rate began slowing down as a result and I became sluggish, and flabby.

Reality struck just before my 40th birthday some years back when I realised that I needed to find the time to get fit, sleep longer hours and eat the most important meal of the day. After all, my late maternal grandfather had diabetes and my Dad had just been told he was pre-diabetic. I could well be next in line if I persisted with my unhealthy habits.

So, I got myself a cross trainer and began my daily exercise regimen on it, doing 30 minutes while watching telly or listening to music. It helps take away the monotony. I am not as diligent as I used to be but I still try to get 150 minutes a week on it. It feels good. I feel fitter and more energetic. And if a couch potato like me can do it, you can too. You've got to start somehow and somewhere. Before it is too late.

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