

# Fitness to practise

by David Bretton

*'The first wealth is health,' Ralph Waldo Emerson said*

The Dalai Lama was asked: 'What thing about humanity surprises you the most?' He replied: 'Man. He sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices his money to recuperate his health...'

In this opening article of DentaltownUK Health and Fitness section I wanted to discuss a simple but important question: Does health and fitness matter to the dental professional? To those who consider health and fitness of no relevance to them, I urge you to read on with an open mind.

Before discussing the relevance of health and fitness to the dental professional, let's just get a few things clear. I am not suggesting that all dental professionals need to train for marathons, become elite athletes or even have to join a local gym. What I am suggesting is that you take care of your health and wellbeing.

In this article I will discuss a few reasons why I feel that we, as dentists, have a particularly unhealthy occupation and why caring for our physical and mental health is important.

## An Unhealthy Occupation

As dentists I think we have a pretty sedentary job. Most of us spend our days in one room, often sitting for most of the day, as our nurses run around the practice taking care of our every need.

Besides the lack of movement, we tend to hold a pretty constant static position and poor posture and unnatural movements are common.

Dentists are therefore predisposed to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) in the back, neck and shoulders. The most at risk dentist is the one who works without magnification, bending over backwards (literally) to care for that lovely elderly lady who 'can't lay back in the chair' (you know who she is!)

To top it off we also have one of the most stressful jobs with one of the highest suicide rates. Unfortunately the stresses in the profession only appears to be rising: increasing legislation, litigation and patient expectations mean the future perhaps look more stressful than ever.

## Your Body

By taking part in a physical exercise programme that includes e.g. cardiovascular, strength and

flexibility training we can greatly reduce our risk to many types of illness, including MSDs. This will lead to an improved quality of life and will likely mean less time off work and a longer career and life. 'Those who do not find time for exercise will have to find time for illness' – Edward Stanley

## Your Mind

The body and mind are one. Caring for our physical health has been shown to have great positive benefits for our mental health. Exercising is effective at reducing stress, anxiety and depression and helping improve confidence and mood. By engaging in health and fitness we are also likely to acquire many other mental skills that can help enhance us both professionally and personally e.g. discipline, motivation and time management.

## Social Benefits

Besides great benefits for both our physical and mental health – exercising can also have great social benefits. As dentists we can become quite isolated. By taking part in physical activities there is an opportunity to meet new people and form new relationships and interests.

## Conclusion

I would therefore conclude that health and fitness is extremely important to the dental professional – I think it has many positive impacts for both your personal and professional life. ■

*'To keep the body in good health is a duty, otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear' – Buddha*



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