

How do you get patients to exercise?

I emphasize two things:

1. It is single best way to improve health and increase longevity; and
2. It only takes 30 minutes three times a week (2% of your week).

I ride my bike to work and park it in my office. My patients have to walk by my office and they know I rode to work that day. It is hard for them to come up with excuses. Live by example.

I often screen for and find insulin resistance and/or metabolic syndrome. We talk about the metabolic process and how an exercised muscle helps improve these disease processes - weight reduction, lower BP, decreased insulin resistance, etc. I also explain that our muscles store energy and that is the energy we use when we get up and walk, carry laundry to the washer, walk at work, etc. This energy does NOT burn calories. It takes approximately 16 minutes to burn off stored energy and start burning calories, that is why the excuse of I walk a lot at work or at home does not fly. It has to be more than 16 minutes of aerobic exercise at target heart rate to use up stored energy and start burning calories and fat. Once they truly understand how their body works, many, not all, are more motivated. We also discuss what will happen if they do not start to exercise - the progression of disease process including effects of overweight and obesity. I am starting to see an interest in my patients. It takes repeated discussion, but some are starting. It is especially hard with the weather getting cooler and getting dark sooner. Anyway, that is my strategy.

I tell them to aim for a goal of 15 minutes twice per day, something moderate and continuous, like walking around the block, a stationary bike ride, or just marching in front of the TV. I'm not sure how well it works.