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Monday

**WHAT'S YOUR
WORKOUT?**
By JEN MURPHY



Basketball Helps Accountant Deal With Tax-Season Stresses

March 28, 2005

Editor's Note: What's Your Workout? is an Online Journal column that looks at busy businesspeople's fitness routines. Here, tax attorney E. Martin Davidoff discusses how long work hours during tax season throw a curve ball in his workout schedule, and why he credits basketball pickup games for his improved health.

THE EXECUTIVE

E. Martin Davidoff, 53 years old, is a certified public accountant and tax attorney in Dayton, N.J. He is married with two daughters, ages 24 and 22, and resides in East Brunswick, N.J.

THE WORKOUT

Tax season may be the best time of year professionally for Mr. Davidoff, but the worst time when it comes his health.

With the long hours spent at the office, high levels of work stress and seemingly endless cartons of Chinese takeout, Mr. Davidoff tries hard to stick to his workout regimen -- something he has made progress on in the last few years after being diagnosed with high blood pressure.

About four years ago, his doctor told him to lose weight and get his blood-pressure level of 150/100 under control with the help of medication. In about four months, he dropped 20 pounds, stabilized his blood pressure to a more acceptable level and then got his doctor's OK to start playing basketball again.

"I'm not a good player but I try hard," says Mr. Davidoff.

He began playing basketball 10 years ago with a group of men at the East Brunswick Jewish Center. He says he probably still is in the poorest shape of all the guys in group, most of whom are in their 40s. Mr. Davidoff would make sporadic appearances at the pickup games, often letting his busy work schedule interfere. Not much for going to the gym, the only other exercise Mr. Davidoff got was coaching soccer for his kids' teams two to three times a week.

But since his doctor's warning on his health, Mr. Davidoff has been strict about fitting in two days of ball each week -- and still makes an effort to play during late March and early April, the busiest time before the tax

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deadline, to help relieve stress.

"When we're out there we aren't just lollygagging around," he says. "For a couple hours a week it's very vigorous cardio exercise."

THE DIET

At five feet 11 1/2 inches tall and 239 pounds, Mr. Davidoff is still trying to slim down. He was on a popular diet plan when he lost weight four years ago, but after he stopped the program he gained back 10 of the 20 pounds he lost. He says his ideal weight is 200 or 210, but his short-term goal is 220.

"I've got to go a little at a time," he says.

THE ROUTINE

Sunday: Basketball, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Wednesday: Basketball, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Saturday: Walks with his wife after dinner

Mr. Davidoff says he has better control of what he eats after April 15, when his schedule becomes more predictable. He works from noon to 4 a.m. three days a week during tax season, and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays. He's usually in the office from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays.

The 24-hour WaWa around the corner from the office can easily become a crutch for snacking at all hours, he says. Temptations also abound in the workplace. Some of his clients bring in survival packs loaded with cookies and chips for him and his staff. Occasionally, he will sneak a chocolate Hostess cupcake as a treat.

To stave off the late-night snacking and large Chinese takeout orders, he'll make a run to the Stop & Shop, stocking up with about \$150 worth of low-sodium soup, apple sauce, fruit and other healthy foods for his office kitchen. He says his wife makes an effort to cook a balanced meal for him when he eats dinner at home.

THE EFFORT

A few years ago, he signed up for a lifetime membership at a health club near his home with the goal of working out more frequently. But the monthly fee isn't enough of an incentive. In his three years of membership, he estimates that he has used the facility 10 times.

"I feel guilty I don't use it," he admits. "But I do think I'll try to go back" when tax season ends.

Part of the reason is that he finds the gym setting too boring. "I have to do something fun," he says. "If I could do a competition and race around to eight or 10 machines and someone scored me on them and it was a game maybe it would be different."

His wife, concerned about his health, often coaxes him to walk around the block after dinner. Their block is eight-tenths of a mile and the couple will do three to four loops on weekend evenings. "I would never go on my own because it's boring," he says. "The only reason I go is because I'm going with her. She provides good conversation."



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THE COST

Membership for the Jewish Center is \$25 a year, and his other gym membership is \$19 a month.

QUESTIONS ON FITNESS?

E-mail your questions on working out and dieting, plus suggestions and thoughts on the column, to workout@wsj.com.

Mr. Davidoff also played on another basketball team this year, where the cost was \$50 for the season, plus paying the

referee.

THE BENEFIT

Before Mr. Davidoff began playing ball regularly, he says he would get winded doing basic activities. Even moving his daughters' belongings into their new apartments was physically draining.

Now, since he has made a point of playing basketball four hours a week and trying to eat foods lower in sodium, his blood pressure hovers around the normal level of 120/80, and he says he feels less stressed. "The fun part makes me want to play and the good-for-me part makes me make the time to do it," he says.

"I have to get physical exercise," he says. "If I don't, I'll become a fat lazy blob."

Write to Jen Murphy at workout@wsj.com

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HYPERTENSION

Nearly one in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure, according to the American Heart Association.

Blood pressure is the force in the arteries when the heart beats (systolic pressure) and when the heart is at rest (diastolic pressure). High blood pressure adds to the workload of your heart and arteries. It's measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg). Normal or average blood pressure is usually around 120/80 mm Hg.

Controllable risk factors include: obesity, eating too much salt, lack of physical activity and stress.

Ways to Control High Blood Pressure

- Have it checked regularly.
- Know what your weight should be. Keep it at that level or below.
- Don't use too much salt in cooking or at meals. Avoid salty foods.
- Eat a low in saturated fat diet according to American Heart Association recommendations.
- Control alcohol intake. Don't have more than one drink a day for women or two a day for men.
- Follow your doctor's advice about physical activity.
- Take your medicine as prescribed. Don't run out of pills even for a single day.

[Read more tips.](#)

Source: *American Heart Association*

ABOUT WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT

What's Your Workout is an occasional Wall Street Journal Online column that looks at the lifestyles and fitness routines of busy executives. It's written by Jen Murphy. Ms. Murphy, an avid runner and fitness enthusiast, was a personal trainer for three years at Northeastern University's Marino Fitness Center. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northeastern University.

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