

Body and Mind Preservation during COVID

Category: Exercise

written by Melody Abraham | July 1, 2021

At the beginning of the pandemic, our hospital's new gym, which had barely opened, shut down due to the strict COVID-control measures. The YMCA pool where I swam each week also closed. And my personal training sessions became virtual, conducted from a makeshift workout space in my basement.

As my workdays became unusually long, with no breaks to speak of, my endurance took a dive. My trainer kept insisting I needed to do more cardio; my occasional elliptical workout was not sufficient, he said. I told him my low energy was due to the sparse and interrupted sleep I got as a busy obstetrician; he didn't buy my thinking.

I had a stellar medical report from my internist: my blood tests couldn't have been better—TSH, 2; HDL, 90; vitamin D3, in range; iron count, perfect. So why did I feel so tired? Maybe it was the allergies I'd suffered from since my youth? Maybe it was the angst brought on by the pandemic, combined with the worrisome political climate that kept me glued to the news, thinking the world was about to end? Or maybe it was mounting family obligations that had me running all the time? Or the many hours I spent in the office racing against the clock? Maybe, just maybe, it was mental fatigue, the kind that no physical exercise can help.

The main way I had de-stressed in the past was by taking nice, long international trips two or three times a year to escape the daily grind. That luxury disappeared with COVID-19. So I decided to combine exercise with relaxation by going on regular weekend hikes around town, a safe activity during the pandemic. I am fortunate to live in an area that boasts great hiking trails, some even within walking distance of my house. This was my saving grace. I felt reenergized after each weekend hike and ready to tackle the busy, stressful week.

After the arrival of the vaccines, and the slow reopening, I decided it was finally safe to return to the gym. I still wear my mask, as mandated by the hospital, and try to go at the least busy time. I am also meeting again in person with my trainer at his gym, where they are maintaining masking and distancing protocols out of an abundance of caution. My area has a high rate of vaccinated people, which is reassuring.

But it's clear that for me, and many of my patients as well, exercise preserved our sanity and imparted some tranquility during the long months of COVID.

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