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2009

# Too busy to be healthy? join the club

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## Recommended Citation

Halpin, Patricia A., "Too busy to be healthy? join the club" (2009). *The University Dialogue*. 51.  
[https://scholars.unh.edu/discovery\\_ud/51](https://scholars.unh.edu/discovery_ud/51)

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# Too busy to be healthy? Join the club.

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Obesity and sedentary lifestyles are common today. While obesity has become a global phenomenon, America is leading the way (Chopra, Galbraith and Darton-Hill, 2002). There are a number of national initiatives such as Healthy People 2010 (Kepel and Percy, 2009). However to be successful in empowering a nation to lead healthy and active lives, it has to start with the individual. It is possible that everyone can be more active and make healthy dietary choices. In order for this goal to be achieved, it has to begin with a positive *can do* attitude and peer support. Meeting the goal of obtaining a healthy and active life starts with small changes that can be maintained over a lifetime. We are all in this together and every individual should be active and eat well. This goal can be achieved.

When was the last time you heard someone say they had free time? Most likely it would be difficult to recall. As a nation we are constantly telling each other how busy we are. While I cannot imagine that the lives of our forbearers two hundred years ago were less busy, they had one advantage over our present generation: The lifestyles of our ancestors were more active by nature and necessity. As our activity levels decrease, our obesity levels increase. In 2008, 38.2 % of N.H. residents had a Body Mass Index (BMI)  $\geq 25$ , which is considered overweight, and 24.2 % had a BMI  $\geq 30$ , which is considered obese (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). The implications for this are staggering. The cost to keep this population alive for the remainder of their normal life expectancy will be very high. Yet there is a simple solution—adding more activity to daily life. Many will say it won't make a difference to include small amounts of physical activity into your life as fitness experts say as much as sixty minutes per day is required to stay healthy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Yet the alternative is not sedentary. Moderate amounts of physical activity and exercise will benefit your overall health.

It may seem as if college students have a disadvantage because their daily course schedule is decided for them. If someone preferred to exercise in the afternoon

and now they have classes or labs every afternoon, they would consider themselves unable to exercise. Instead of complaining, think about the alternatives. Do you have a long walk from where you parked your car to where you have class? Well, you have a heavy backpack on, so pick up the pace and consider it a workout. If you live on campus and have to cross campus to make it to your next class, don't trudge along. Pick up the pace and consider it an addition of activity built into your day. Use the time and distance to your advantage. When you arrive at the building, use the stairs and take them more quickly than you normally would. These are great additions that when first added may seem awkward but when consistently done will become automatic over time.

What other ways are there to add activity every day? First and foremost, invest in your health by purchasing a pair of comfortable sneakers. Second, leave the sneakers and clean socks in your car or by the door in your room. This way they are handy, and you won't need to spend time searching for them. Instead of hanging out after class with your roommate in your dorm room or at the café, put your sneakers on and go for a walk with a friend and discuss the day. Here in Manchester we are lucky to have wide brick sidewalks on both sides our buildings. On one side is the beautiful Amoskeag River, which is always fun to walk along. Look up and you may see one of the resident bald eagles. On the other side is Commercial Street. If you keep walking past the Granite Street Bridge, you will end up at the Merchant-sauto.com stadium, home of the N.H. Fisher Cats.

Enlisting peer support is also a great idea. Walk together and discuss issues. When you have to meet with your adviser or professor, usually a period of time is set aside and agreed upon. If you will not be using technology for your discussion, suggest going outside and talking while you take a short walk around the building. The fresh air and change of scenery is apt to lift your mood as well as resolve the current issue at the same time.

Late afternoon snacking is a habit practiced by many of us. Caffeine is also often used to perk the brain up to ensure that mental capacity remains high throughout the remainder of the day. Instead of a poor choice of snack or caffeine, have a big glass of water and grab something prepackaged. "Prepackaged" in this case means an apple, a box of raisins, or vegetables pre-sliced and ready to go. The benefit is huge and the energy boost will last you until dinner.

Let us all move past the most common excuses for lack of attention to our health. The ones always heard are "I don't have time," and "I don't like to exercise." No one has free time to spare, so you have to schedule exercise into your day. It really does not matter whether we like the exercise, it just matters that we do it. Where do we get the time to Facebook, text message, email, surf the web, Twitter, or blog? Yet that is always a high priority. We are all in this together; everyone needs to eat a healthy diet and remain active. I know your mother told you that you were special, but in this case we all have the same requirements for health.

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