

Lawyers, Look after Yourself!

Things to do, or not do, to improve your overall well-being

By Daniel E. Cummins

Lawyers spend their days making cases for others day in and day out. As we pass the midpoint of another year, how about making it a priority to take some time periodically to make a better case for yourself?

Many a column has been written to offer law-practice tips for improving one's outlook for the year ahead (and thereby avoid stress). This article looks outside the office and the rigors of law practice and offers suggestions on things to do, or not do, over the next year to improve your overall well-being. These tips are offered in the hope of helping you to become a less harried and more productive lawyer.



Exercise

Walk. Trot. Run. Work out. Do yoga. Join a gym. Play pickup basketball. Do anything. Just get moving and keep moving any way you can at least two days a week, if not daily. Even just half-hour increments of cardio activity of some form will help relieve stress, shed extra pounds and improve your cardiac health.

Your health may also benefit if you stand more while working at your desk. More and more studies show that sitting on your butt in the office all day, every day, is not good for your health. Do they really need studies to prove that? Apparently so, as those studies purport to show that sitting for hours on end at a desk job on a daily basis can lead to chronic back pain and also an increased risk for heart disease and kidney disease that could cut years off your life.

In light of these studies, there are now attachments available that you can place on your desk that allow you to work from a standing position with your laptop or otherwise.





One way to remember to stand more at your desk every day is to make and take all of your telephone calls while standing. Whenever that phone rings or a call gets buzzed into you, stand up to take the call and remain standing for the duration of the call. If you get winded from standing while talking on the phone, your chair will always be right there for you to plop into.

Eat Breakfast, Take a Vitamin

It is often said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Stockpile energy first thing in the morning for the day ahead with a light but healthy meal. Eating breakfast is like filling the gas tank in the morning and taking off full speed ahead.

Even better, a good breakfast may prevent those ridiculously loud and long stomach growls that embarrassingly fill the room during those inevitably coincidental silences during that second hour of a 10 a.m. deposition.

Try oatmeal. It's a wonder food that's great against cholesterol and a great source of healthy fiber. Add fruit and nuts to it to mix it up, to add flavor and to get even more health benefit.

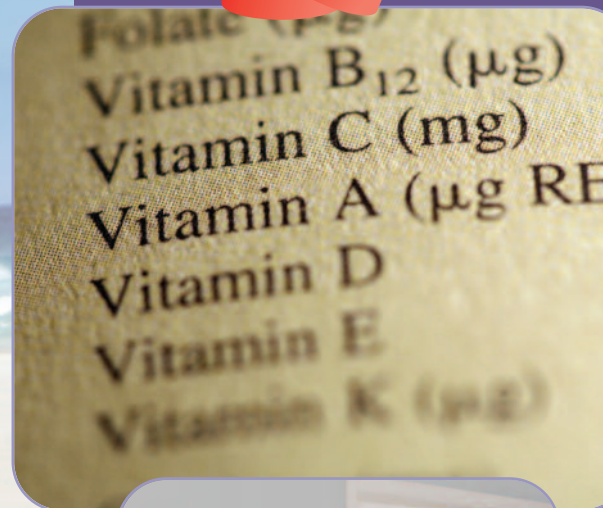
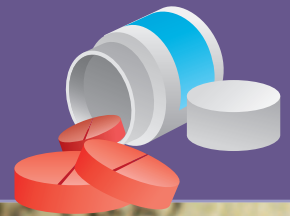
While you're at it, pop a multivitamin with a glass of orange juice every morning with breakfast to ensure that you're getting your daily recommended nutrients and vitamin C.

Be sure to eat more colors during the rest of the day. They keep saying that adding more colorful food to your diet may be healthier for you. This can be accomplished by purposefully adding more fruits and vegetables and juice to your diet.

Get an Annual Physical

Schedule and get an annual physical to keep tabs on your health. To remember, schedule it around your birthday. Check into and ask for any other tests you should complete for whatever age bracket you're in. Better to catch things early, before they get out of hand.

If you wear glasses or contacts, schedule an annual vision checkup around your birthday as well.





Ditch Soda, Drink Water

They say that pouring Coca-Cola on your driveway can help remove oil stains. Studies also equate drinking a can of soda to eating 10 teaspoonfuls of sugar.

They also say that our bodies are 60 percent water and our brains are 70 percent water. I don't believe any percentage of our body or brain is soda.

Studies equate drinking a can of soda to eating 10 teaspoonfuls of sugar. Which do you think we need more, soda or water?

So which do you think we need more, soda or water? You do the math.

If water is too boring for you, add lemon or lime juice or try flavored waters or vitamin waters.

Use Sunscreen

As Kurt Vonnegut never said to graduates during a graduation speech — it was an early Internet hoax attributing the quote to him — “Use sunscreen.”

Remember to use sunscreen in the form of a lotion with a decent SPF even in the winter. While the sun may be weaker during the winter months, the sun's glare off ice and snow can still cause skin damage to your face and hands.

Feel that global warming on the top of your head or the back of your neck in the summer? Simply put, the ozone layer isn't what it used to be.

So it pays in terms of the health of your skin to apply sunscreen regularly and at all times of the year. Don't forget the back of your neck and a touch around the ears on a daily basis.

And don't forget to close that sunroof in your vehicle except for those times when you need a dose of sunshine to warm you or cheer you up.

Don't Use the Phone While Driving

Put your cellphone out of reach while driving. It's too tempting during a drive to reach for it to catch up on email or phone calls.

Studies show that driving while distracted — talking on your cellphone or, even worse, texting — can be just as dangerous as driving drunk. So keep the phone out of reach and arrive alive. Whatever's on your phone can wait.

If the above warnings are not enough, keep in mind that there is a push in the courts to allow for the imposition of punitive damages against drivers who cause car accidents while using a cellphone. Punitive damages are not covered by personal automobile insurance policies and will have to be paid out of your pocket. If that doesn't get an attorney's attention, nothing will.

Be Present

Whether you remember the phrase from Latin class or the movie “Dead Poets Society,” invoke the term *carpe diem* as often as you can — seize the day, every day. When enjoying special moments with your family or friends, purposefully commit those moments to memory and appreciate the fact that you are experiencing them at that very instant.

Outside of work, try to listen to others as intently as you listen to judges addressing you during oral arguments.

Are you ever distracted in court by matters of concern outside of work? If not, then don't let your interactions with others outside of work happen with half of your mind distracted by matters from the office. Try to listen to others without being distracted by work issues such as: Did I mail that letter? Was that brief filed? Did I return that phone call?





Take a Vacation

Get out of town and leave your laptop at home. Go somewhere warm in the winter. In the alternative, take a “staycation” at home to enjoy extended time with your family or accomplish those things that need doing around the house.

Get a Hobby

When's the last time you undertook an activity on a regular basis outside of work that was fun? Getting away from work through hobbies and recreational activities will give your brain a rest, reduce your stress level and allow you to return to your practice rejuvenated.

Try to get back to reading for enjoyment or rekindle that learning spirit that got you through college and law school. It's still there in you; you just have to tap into it.

Every once in a while do something — anything — just to get away from the practice of law, stretch out your legs and ease your mind.

Do Random Acts of Kindness

Make Oprah proud and do random acts of kindness as often as you can. You'll feel good about yourself and you may help someone else have a better day. And remember, what goes around comes around.

So hold that door open for someone. Delay that elevator when you see someone obviously rushing to make it. Leave 20 percent or slightly more for the waiter or waitress who does a nice job. Greet everyone you know with a smile and enthusiasm.

Birthdays are important days in the lives of others. So mark your calendar with the birthdays of others and send birthday cards to help them feel celebrated.

And don't forget to be extra nice to legal secretaries and court personnel. After all, they have to put up with lawyers all day.

Routinely Say 'Please' and 'Thank You'

Practice politeness every second. Give gratitude daily. As stated by writer

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Outside of work, try to listen to others as intently as you listen to judges addressing you during oral arguments.

William Arthur Ward, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

On the other side of the equation, a person worthy of receiving gratitude from you is likely to remember it if you don't give it. Do you really think you are as likely to get another referral, favor or break from someone if you forget to thank them?

In everyday life, things will surely move along nicer, smoother and even perhaps quicker if you always start with "please" and end with "thank you" in every interaction with another, whether you are in court or not.

It's not often that you get a handwritten thank-you these days, but you certainly remember that great feeling of being appreciated the last time you opened such a note addressed to you.

Get some blank thank-you notes and send one every chance you get. At the very least send a thank-you email and/or give a quick thank-you call whenever the opportunity arises.

Thank *you* for taking the time to read this article. ♦



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