

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Olympian-turned-advisor talks sleep and wellness

Since joining MD Management Limited and working with many physicians, I have seen many similarities between elite athletes and physicians. It's not only in their personalities but also in their thought processes – all of which I can relate to.

One of the pleasures of my client meetings is getting an insider view of the medical profession. I'm glad to see the topic of physician wellness is moving to the forefront, thanks to increased conversations, conferences, forums and media coverage – all of which are helping to remove the stigma for those at risk of burnout.

As a former Olympic athlete, I know what it's like to work hard, strive to be your best and, unfortunately, sometimes to burn out and not want to admit it.

One of the things I learned early – and many of my physician clients would agree – is that getting enough sleep is a fundamental way to improve health and wellness. I have found these reminders from [onboardMD](#) helpful in prioritizing my sleep.

Exercise your right to exercise

You already know that physical activity is key to a healthy lifestyle – and it's vital for healthy sleep, too. Exercise improves your quality of sleep and has profound positive effects on your mental health.

Working out with others can add an extra layer of motivation. In your community, as a member of the Alberta Medical Association, you can volunteer with the [AMA Youth Run Club](#) and encourage students to be physically active and live healthy lives.

Reminder: Be careful about *when* you go for that 5K run or decide to tackle that push-up challenge. Studies have shown that intense physical activity later in the day might make it more difficult to fall asleep.

Caffeine: friend or foe?

It's true: Caffeine can boost your alertness for up to half an hour and even the National Sleep Foundation agrees that the occasional coffee, latté, tea or can of cola is fine. But drinking too much has its drawbacks: caffeine overload results in restlessness and even insomnia, which affect your ability to concentrate and disrupt your natural sleep cycle.

Reminder: Caffeine is great for a quick jolt of energy, but it's easy to overdo it. Recent research has found that the amount of caffeine your body can handle is [hardwired into your DNA](#).

Harness your Type A personality

Often sleep is the activity that happens after everything else is finished – and for most doctors, there's *a lot* of everything else. Fortunately, you're highly organized, super-

disciplined and extremely intelligent. Put all that to work for your brain and body by giving your sleep the same thought and attention that you give your work.

Reminder: Research, test and modify the [sleep strategies](#) that work best for you.

Set yourself up for success

Surgeons curate special playlists for when they operate. A family doctor's waiting room is decorated to put patients at ease. Getting a good night's sleep requires the same sort of set-dressing. It's all about establishing the right conditions. From blackout blinds, to ear plugs and eye masks, to white noise machines, countless tools and technologies are out there.

Reminder: Charge your phone somewhere other than in your bedroom. Not only does this prevent you from exposing yourself to the blue light of your screen (which can [affect your balance of melatonin and cortisol](#)), it can also reduce anxiety and stress.

Beyond the bedroom

Getting enough sleep is just one personal wellness challenge for physicians to tackle. On a national level, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) is spearheading a [national physician wellness strategy](#).

Locally, [Well Doc Alberta](#) was launched last year to help shape the future of physician wellness. Thanks to a recent [\\$1.6 million contribution](#) from MD Financial Management, the CMA and Scotiabank, Well Doc Alberta plans to develop, pilot and refine resources that could be leveraged to help physicians across Canada.

Wellness also includes looking after your financial fitness. Knowing your financial goals are set and in progress allows you to focus on your work-life balance to avoid burnout.

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