

# Ready, Set, Relax

We asked five physicians how they upkeep their mental wellness amid their busy schedules. Be it personal improvement, leisure activities with family and friends, or simply having time to themselves, these doctors show us how it's done.



*Dr David Su is an orthopaedic surgeon at The Orthopaedic Centre Novena, Farrer and Orchard. He has a special interest in foot and ankle conditions. A once-avid triathlete, he has completed the Ironman Langkawi, Ironman Western Australia, Escape from Alcatraz triathlons, among others. He is married with three children.*

My sporting background and personal experience with managing busy work schedules as a doctor in institutional practice, and now in private practice, have been valuable in my advice to patients, who range from elite athletes to busy executives.

I participated in triathlons as a junior doctor, and went on to complete the Ironman Western Australia during my registrar days, raising funds for the Handicaps Welfare Association. However, my exercise regimen had to be adapted since I started a family.

Long hours of training (including bike rides at 3 am) in preparation for the gruelling Ironman Triathlon has now given way to shorter and more varied workouts. In order to be more family-friendly, my training was modified to include my children so we could inculcate sports as a regular family bonding and fitness activity.

My children will cycle or kick-scoot alongside when I go for my weekly runs, which can vary from endurance to tempo runs,

once or twice a week. For variation and greater intensity, I combine high intensity interval training (running intervals around a park with slopes) with circuit training on the pull-up bars and chest dips on parallel bars in between. We also practise agility ladder drills to help my kids, who are learning tennis, improve their footwork, balance and coordination.

Varying the exercise routine and moderating the intensity reduce the risks of injury and keep it from getting monotonous. Finding activities where we can exercise together as a family is also more inclusive and fun.

On top of that, I also learn from exercising with my children. Seeing their recreational gymnastic routines has reminded me that core strength training and flexibility should be incorporated into any individual's fitness programme.



#### From top

Tempo runs with children as they kick-scoot on the park connector

Circuit training at the exercise corner in between running intervals



*Dr Anandan Gerard is a family physician in Queenstown Polyclinic. He loves witty conversation, smiley patients and double cheeseburgers. Best thing he learned this year: practice makes perfect, so be careful what you practise.*

My favourite way to de-stress, after a full day of convincing patients to take their statins, is to gather a few friends and have a game of Settlers of Catan or Balderdash. Competitive board and card games have always been a breath of invigorating air for me. I enjoy the challenge of thinking out of the box and figuring out the best route to a goal that is five to ten steps ahead. If you've ever read Ender's Game, you'll understand how mental stimulation in one realm can have applications in real-life situations.

The other way I relax is making desserts. I have a sweet tooth, and it annoys me when a dessert that looks nice in a shop's display ends up tasting terrible. If you want something done right, sometimes you just have to do it yourself. My best recipes are not from cookbooks or the internet. Instead, they are from my mother's well-worn notebook and hand-me-down recipes shared among my



**An intense game of Settlers of Catan cools off nicely with a bowl of home-made chocolate ice cream**

domestic goddess friends. Thanks to them, my kitchen has given birth to some really yummy goodies like tiramisu, sticky date and toffee pudding, carrot cake, ultra rich and creamy vanilla and chocolate ice cream, and the *piece de resistance* – my mother's chocolate box gateau (think rocky road sans marshmallows). Now you know why I'm a fan of statins.



*Dr Rena Dharmawan is currently a third year general surgery resident with SingHealth. She obtained her medical degree as part of the inaugural batch of Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School. She also has a bachelor's degree in biomedical engineering from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.*

I fell in love with running during my freshman year at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Due to the cold weather, I was mainly restricted to running indoors on the treadmill. When I returned to Singapore in 2007 for medical school, I discovered the greatness of outdoor running. Not only does the run seem shorter, with goals of reaching a certain destination or completing a certain route instead of merely hitting a targeted distance, but I also get to indulge in my other favourite pastime of people watching. Additionally, I enjoy the scorching sun and humidity. There is this unexplainable sense of accomplishment completing a run all drenched in my own sweat.

On weekdays, I used to either do a quick run in the mornings before ward rounds or in the evenings, on the occasional days when I got off early. Doing a run post-

call, instead of crashing way before my normal bedtime, also helped to reset my body's biological clock. Over the weekends, I would try to do longer runs in the mornings. This routine took my mind off work and kept me going strong.

Last year, I took a year off my residency training to do a medtech innovation fellowship with Singapore-Stanford Bidesign, where I spent six months at Stanford University. Coincidentally, I was also expecting our little one then. With the amazing weather in California, I continued jogging (in moderation) throughout my pregnancy up till about 30 weeks. Our daughter is now ten months old, and though I wish I had the energy to continue my previous running routine, I could only try my best to slot in at least three quick sessions a week.

Nevertheless, as the saying goes, "Runs end. Running doesn't." So keep running!





*Dr Alvin Ng is a consultant respiratory physician and intensivist with Changi General Hospital. He is also the deputy chief surgeon of the St John Brigade Singapore. He was awarded the United Nations Peacekeeping Medal and the Force Commander Letter of Commendation for medical services rendered in Timor Leste.*

When I was single, I pursued many interests like watching movies, reading comics, playing video games, building Gundam model kits and collecting toys. Now, with the joy of raising young children in the house, these activities had to take a back seat while I balance my family life with a busy work schedule. My boys come first, so important family time begins once my hospital work ends.

When my eldest son recently turned five, the opportunity arose for me to morph my old pastimes into quality indoor time with my boy. Our shared hobbies have now evolved into watching animation movies, reading children's comics, playing multi-player kids' video games, building Lego sets, and opening once-treasured collectable toys to have fun with together.

Our biggest motivation for working hard is to provide a better future for our children. Sometimes work becomes all-consuming and we forget to prioritise quality time with our family instead. I will never lose sight of that goal, and even if I did, my wife would remind me that family comes first.



**Hoping my kids will support Manchester United so we can enjoy watching football matches as a family very soon!**

Being an outgoing person, she will organise frequent family field trips to the beach, skate-scooting at Bishan Park, outings to Universal Studios Singapore, and overseas trips.

A balanced lifestyle is important. A successful family life ensures a healthy state of mind to tackle work challenges. A good working life ensures work stressors do not overflow into family time. With the right equilibrium, the most important part of our lives – our family – can be enjoyed.



*Dr Derrick Lian is a histopathologist at KK Women's and Children's Hospital. He is also a Certified Specialist of Wine (Society of Wine Educators), Introductory Sommelier (Court of Master Sommeliers), and has the Wine and Spirits Education Trust Level 1 and Level 2 Certifications.*

I embarked on wine studies for the challenge – the Master Sommelier Exam is known to be one of the toughest assessments ever. There are only about 200 people who have earned this qualification in the world, and none of them are from Singapore.

Contrary to popular belief, wine classes consist of more than just drinking glass after glass of (insert most expensive wine you know here). Wine studies encompass a broad knowledge base, including chemistry (the technical details of how wine is made, how much sulphur needs to be added, or the chemical reaction behind malolactic fermentation); biology (the Latin names of the various grape species); geography (the different wine regions in the world and soil



**Learning the Geography of Spain, with bottles of social lubricant in the foreground (with permission from Lim Hwee Peng School of Wine)**

types of each region); law (the wine laws of various countries); and even some medicine (the effects of alcohol on your body).

While I know now that I cannot be a wine master who is able to announce the wine's grape varietal, region of the world and vintage from just a single swirl, sniff and sip from a glass of wine, at least I am no longer intimidated by the dizzying array of wine on a supermarket shelf!