

# A Cautionary Tale That Could Save Your Life

By Michael Meister

On October 10, 2006 I had just returned to my office from a beating in district court. My dad had stopped by to discuss a case he was working on, when I doubled over with pain in the lower portion of my left chest. The pain came and went, but each succeeding pain was worse than the one before. Finally, my dad made me get up and he took me to the hospital, where I was stabilized and carted off to Fort Collins to undergo a heart catheterization. Needless to say, two days and a stent later I was released. At 45 years of age I was lucky. I got to experience all the pain of a heart attack without any of the damage. So began my journey to getting my health back.

The practice of law, as we all know, can be extremely stressful. Stress has been identified as one of the primary problems that contribute to cardiovascular disease. It goes back to our biological roots. When the saber tooth was bearing down on our ancestor, his heart rate went up and his blood thickened in anticipation of needing to clot quickly when the big cat laid him open. While the big cats are gone, the body's response to stress remains the same. As we sit in our offices all day and undergo stressful situations over and over, our blood gets thicker and thicker and our hearts work harder and harder. What's a lawyer to do?

I am now on a crusade to remind each of you that while we all take care of our clients, you must remember to take care of yourself. After all, if you are not around, you can't take care of your client's problems very well.

After my episode, (It was not a heart attack – no damage = no “heart attack”) I was permitted to lift no more than five pounds and I was only permitted to walk 10 minutes three times a day. That meant I got about three blocks from my house and had to turn around and go home. That meant I couldn't pour the milk for my kids because we buy milk in gallon jugs and a gallon weighs six pounds. After three weeks of being the proverbial invalid, I was finally enrolled in a cardiac rehab program at the local hospital and began my journey back to the fit and trim person I once was many years ago. I purchased two books – that's what lawyers do – we buy books and a good friend brought me four more. (He is a lawyer, too.) Of course, not being able to do much allowed for plenty of time to read them and read them I did. The books dealt with the all important issues of stress management, diet and nutrition, and exercise.

Two books which have been particularly helpful to me and I highly commend for your reading are *Stress Management for Lawyers*, Second Edition by Amiram Elwork, Ph.D., The Vorkell Group ©1997 and *Banish Your Belly* by Kenton Robinson and the Editors of

*Men's Health Books*, Rodale Press, Inc. ©1997. The latter teaches you how to develop an exercise program as well as explaining why your “belly” gets big and why it's important to whittle it down to size. The former helps you get in your head and clear the stress away.

As with any exercise program, after years of inactivity you should first have a full physical. Not one of those “Doc in the Box” jobs, but a good physical with a fully qualified physician that includes all the blood work necessary to know everything there is about you. Talk to the doctor about what you intend to do in terms of exercise, etc. and get his thoughts and recommendations on what happens next.

The next step in your journey back to a fit and healthy lifestyle is shopping. Chances are your old gym clothes don't fit anymore, so get a decent pair of shorts, sweat pants, a couple of t-shirts and a hooded sweatshirt. You will also want a good pair of walking shoes or cross trainers and several pairs of athletic socks. (Running shoes come much later.) Most important, purchase a decent heart rate monitor from your local sporting good store or major discount store and learn how to use it. Once you have your equipment handy, the next step is to make your plan. This where the *Banish Your Belly* mentioned above came in so handy. It is a simple-to-use book which identifies all sorts of physical activity from walking to jogging and

even swimming for all you old swimmers out there. Your ultimate goal is to exercise three times per week for at least 30 minutes each day, which significantly increases your heart health and your overall fitness.

I can hear you all saying, “Sure, Mike, I hear you but I just haven’t got the time.” This is the number one excuse of all non-exercisers and I leave you with this thought. If your doctor told you that your kidneys were failing and that to prolong your life you will need to have dialysis at least 30 minutes every day, I think you would find the time. Heart disease is a long, insidious process that is affected by any number of factors from genetics to inactivity. Don’t you think you can find 30 minutes a day to take care of your heart? I bet you can. After you find the time, enlist a buddy.

Initially it was hard for me to find the time even after my “episode.” My wife

and I have three very active children at all levels of school and I finally came to the realization that the only thing that made sense was a 6 a.m. date at the local YMCA. Then my wife gave me the opening I needed when she asked what I wanted for Christmas. When I told her that I wanted her to get up every morning with me at 6 a.m. and go to the “Y” with me, her response was, “So you want me to kick you out of bed and make you go to the Y.” “No, I want you to get up and go with me,” said I. She reluctantly agreed and now if either of us misses our early morning workout for work or some other demand on our time, we make it up at lunchtime because we have gotten to the point where we actually miss the workout.

I cannot stress how important it is that you take care of number one. As I said earlier, I am one of the lucky ones. I found out how bad it can be without actually having to find out how bad it

can be. By taking care of yourself, you are better able to take care of your clients, wake up refreshed and ready to face the day, and eventually dance at your children’s wedding and grow old with your significant other. Not a bad thing. Life – what a great concept.

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I heartily endorse Mr. Meister’s very heartfelt encouragement toward heart health. I contend that fit lawyers can work harder and longer, with less fatigue, than less fit lawyers, if that appeals to you. If you would like to explore your personal stress and fitness issues, MOLAP is available at 800-688-7859.

— Jim Brady, MOLAP Director