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{COVER STORY}

Physician, Heal Thyself

In order to cure others, doctors need to be fit in the first place. So how do India's top doctors keep themselves in perfect shape?

BY SANCHITA SHARMA

IN THIS too-flabby world, most people need a medical prescription to get on their feet and get some more exercise. India's top doctors, however, tune into their passions to stay fit and de-stress after a long hard day in operation theatres and hospital boardrooms.

Not for them is relaxation about popping some corn and grabbing a beer while spending hours watching mindless television. Neither do they, like the rest of us with limited free time, hit the neighbourhood gym to take turns at every workout machine available there - from weights and rowing machine to the treadmill and stair stepper.

These doctors have found more innovative ways to get a mind-body workout. One's a bicycling fanatic. The other gets his high from running, weight-training and yoga. She likes belly-dancing and doing the salsa. He loves singing his heart out. He's a treadmill guy. Taking their busy schedules into account, they take up an activity that interests them and use it to hone the mind-body skills that can make the difference between life and death for many thousands of people every year.

PHOTOS: RONJOY GOGOI

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"I think dancing is a reason why I love my work so much"

LALITA BADHWAR, consultant gynaecologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi



DANCING RELEASES endorphins – happy hormones – believes Dr Lalita Badhwar. So, after a long day at work, the gynaecologist at Apollo hospital spends her evenings on the dance floor.

In her fifties, Dr Badhwar is full of life. "Dancing is a wonderful way of getting exercise and keeping fit. Every time I dance, I feel exhilarated and young," she says.

Is dancing her mantra of success? "Well yes. It works like sleep for me – a complete way to relax and switch off your work button for a while. After a dancing session I am usually as fresh as morning dew – completely stress free and ready to take up any assignment."

A specialist in laparoscopic surgery, Dr Badhwar has been dancing for more than 20 years now. She specialises in ballroom dances like the waltz, jive, swing and the cha-cha-cha, as well as newer dance forms such as the salsa, merengue and lambada.

She's also learning belly dancing, and why not? It helps her keep in shape and supple. "I am completely in love with my work. It is my bread and butter and, more important, the very reason for my being. But dancing is a passion. It's meditation. It is my energy tonic," says Dr Badhwar.

Her dancing associate Julie Thekkudan, who works with an NGO, is amazed by Dr Badhwar's energy. "It amazes me to see how she juggles medicine and dancing so perfectly."

While Dr Badhwar always knew she wanted to be a doctor, she wasn't sure if she wanted to dance while she was a kid. She was also a theatre artist

"I think dancing is also a reason why I love my work so much," cuts in Dr Badhwar. "Dancing helps me build confidence and concentration and hence boosts my performance manifold."

While Dr Badhwar always knew she wanted to be a doctor, she wasn't sure if she wanted to dance while she was a kid. This gynaecologist was also a theatre artist and has been part of

many plays including *Hayavadana* and *Paseena Paseena*. "It has always been important for me to concentrate my energies into a creative form. I was part of several theatre performances in school and college but after I started practicing medicine, I realised theatre was a team effort and required a lot of coordination, which did not look possible," she says.

So there was a hiatus for a while. After she quit theatre, Dr Badhwar felt as though she was in a creative vacuum, but didn't know what to do. Then she chanced upon a few pamphlets advertising a dance course, which introduced her to her guru, Kiran Kalanauria, who passed away recently. "He danced like a dream. Seeing him perform it dawned on me that this was something I had dreamt of doing as a kid. Whenever I saw people dancing in ballrooms in Hollywood films I would stand in front of the mirror and perform the slow dances," Dr Badhwar remembers.

Her family helps her maintain the balance between work and dance. "My mother-in-law has been a complete support ever since I got married. My husband, Pawan Kapur has been my pillar of strength ever since I was a student."

— Jaya Shroff Bhalla

DANCE THERAPY

Dancing is a wonderful way of keeping fit. Every time I dance, I feel exhilarated and young, says Dr Badhwar

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"Biking & walking are the only exercises I do consistently"

DR S K S MARYA, Director, Orthopaedics, Max Healthcare, New Delhi

THE LONE biker often spotted zooming past joggers on the running track at Vista Villas in Gurgaon is Dr S K S Marya, India's best-known joint-replacement surgeon and addicted biker. His love for surgery and biking are linked, and the connection goes back to his childhood.

Biking is what led him to do what he does today, giving people with damaged knees and hips new joints and getting them back on their feet. An obsessive biker as a child, he got his first mobike when he turned 18. This he promptly crashed and broke, along with his knee. "The bike got replaced, but luckily for me, the knee didn't need replacement, despite the nasty fracture. The fracture did, however, encourage me to read up a lot on joint replacement, which is what I do for a living now," says Dr Marya, who is a third-generation surgeon. His older son has just started studying medicine.

Since then, despite flirting with squash, tennis and swimming, biking has remained a passion and remains his favourite form of exercise. "Despite not one, but two knee fractures in my teens, my knees have never given me any trouble. Till a few years ago, I used to swim and play squash four days a week, something I picked up during my six year stint at Winchester Hospital in the UK," says Dr Marya. Now 50, he was 29 when he returned to

India in 1987 to become the youngest consultant at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.

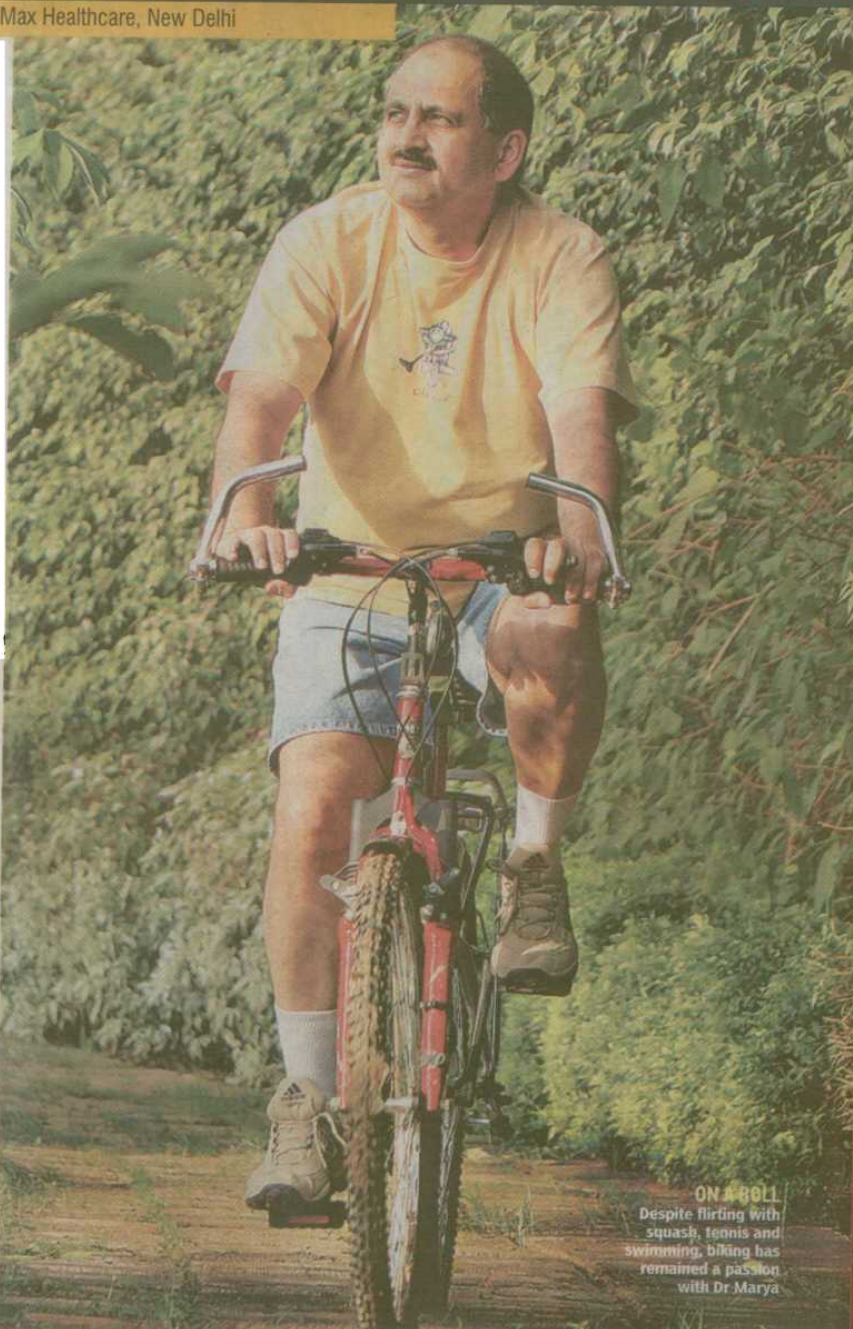
The squash stopped when he moved to Gurgaon on the outskirts of Delhi, so he went back to his first love, biking. Despite his days being packed, Marya insists on at least half an hour of outdoor activity. "I'm up at 5.15 every morning and on my feet at the operating theatre from 8 am to 1 pm. Then it's spending time with patients, hospital rounds and working on research papers.

Over time, I've realised that biking and walking are the only exercises I can do consistently wherever I am, be it at home or travelling. I walk a lot when I travel, more so if there are no biking options," he says.

He's not overweight, but would like to be leaner. "I would like to lose five kg, but I'm happy with my fitness levels. I'm on my feet at least 14 hours a day but do not feel tired at the end of it," he says.

Like most other doctors dealing with life and death issues every day, he is deeply spiritual. "In medicine, the first thing you learn is that two and two doesn't always add up to four. A patient doing very well suddenly slips away and someone we've given up on miraculously recovers. When you are in the operation theatre, you always believe that there is someone out there watching over you," he says.

De-stressing for him is reading airport thrillers, listening to Hindi film songs and watching Bollywood films once in a while. "I love the *Munnabhai* films and have become a big Sanjay Dutt fan. These films remind you of what medicine and humanity are all about," he says.



ON A BOLL
Despite flirting with squash, tennis and swimming, biking has remained a passion with Dr. Marya

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"When I travel, my tracks & trunks go in before my business suits"

DR NARESH TREHAN, heart surgeon and chairman, Global Health Private Ltd, New Delhi



ONE WITH THE WORLD
Yoga, insists Dr Trehan, is a must to start the day with a positive bent of mind

HEART SURGEON Dr Naresh Trehan turns 62 in October but is far fitter than people 20 years younger. He runs 2.5 km in 30 minutes, does yoga and weight training and weighs 72 kg, which is just right for his height. Most people would be happy with those fitness levels, but he's not. "I'd like to get one inch off my belly," he says.

Easily among India's fittest doctors, Dr Trehan adopted a regular fitness regimen almost three decades ago and stuck to it, however tight his schedule. "I don't believe in denial and always advocated doing everything in moderation. I've done everything. I've smoked, I drank and I've done surgeries with a ponytail and a handlebar moustache in New York. I still eat everything, I party and even smoked a cigarette a day till recently," he says.

The thought of a heart surgeon smoking shocked many people, but Dr Trehan stuck to his cigarette-a-day schedule till he gave it up earlier this year. "I decided to practice what I preached. Even smoking one a day is not a good thing," he shrugs.

Despite a 14-hour work schedule, Dr Trehan keeps aside an hour for exercise every day, including weekends. "When I travel, my tracks and trunks go in before my business suits," he says.

His day begins with a 6.30 am run in Lodi Gardens thrice a week - "it's a combina-

tion of running and walking, which is good cardiovascular training," he says - followed by a combination of working out on a cross-trainer, doing weight-training and yoga every alternate day. "I've exercised for at least 40 minutes a day every day for as long as I can remember. Doing a combination of exercises kills the monotony and prevents plateauing," he says. "What I have now is the perfect formula that works for me."

As the chairman of Global Health Private Ltd that is building the 43-acre Medicity in Gurgaon, Dr Trehan plans to integrate new technology with traditional systems of medicine to make health more holistic. "By the end of the decade, synergised medicine will be the buzzword around the world," he predicts.

Of course, there are critics. "There were many more when I left New York University Hospital in 1998 to set up Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre. After spending 18 years in New York, people said it was a stupid decision, but I did okay," says Trehan, who has won almost every national award for excellence, including the Padma Bhushan.

Yoga, he insists, is a must to start the day with a positive bent of mind. "There is so much negativity and greed out there. One needs a holistic mind-body workout with some yoga, meditation and spirituality thrown in. I'm saying this when I'm not religious at all," says Dr Trehan.

"I've always advocated doing everything in moderation. I've done everything. I've smoked, I drank and I've done surgeries with a ponytail and a handlebar moustache in NY"

"It's important to keep the body & brain active"

DR RAMAKANT PANDA, CEO, Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai

IT IS easy to find Dr Ramakant Panda. If the cardio vascular surgeon is not bent over a patient in the Operation Theatre (OT) at Asian Heart Institute in Bandra, you are most likely to catch him on all fours in an adjoining room.

His back will be arched and his head pointing down to the floor. A few seconds later, he will lower his stomach and hollow his back while looking at the ceiling. Ten repetitions later, his left leg is stretched out in the air, followed by the right.

After a few more such exercises to strengthen his back and a five-minute rest on a massage chair, the 53-year-old doctor is back to mending hearts in the OT.

With an average of four to six surgeries a day, Dr Panda has to stand for at least 10 hours, without taking into account the endless rounds to check on in-house patients and the administrative work as CEO of one of the country's biggest cardiac specialty hospitals. A perfect recipe for muscle stiffness, back and knee pain, one would say. But Dr Panda doesn't suffer from either because he exercises after surgeries every evening and often also between them. "It keeps me going," says the doctor, who doesn't have a sign of the paunch that most men at his age sport proudly.

Dr Panda's day begins with exercise, too. He has set up a mini 'body temple' at his house in Khar with weight training and cardio equipment for the purpose. There is huge demand for this space - Dr Panda's wife Sanghamitra, son Saswat (19) and daughter Sonal (18) are equally passionate about fitness - but from 6.30 to 8 am it belongs to Dr Panda. He cycles,

PHOTO: SATISH BATE

HOME GYM

Dr Panda has set up a 'body temple' at his house with weight and cardio equipment



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works out on a cross trainer and does stretching exercises. And, once he has sweated it out he cools down with *pranayam* and *shavasana*.

Two years back, Dr Panda also added weights to his routine. Now, thrice a week he lifts 15 to 40 kilograms to work out his shoulders, biceps, knees and hamstrings. "One starts losing muscle mass as one grows older. So, weight training is very important," he says.

There is no escaping on Sundays and on family vacations, either. "The only time exercise took a backseat in my life was during my eight years at Cleveland Clinic in the United States. We had to work for 40 hours at a stretch and got only got four hours to sleep after that," he says.

The fitness obsession is not new. A competitive runner, Dr Panda's day used to begin with an eight to 10 km jog when he was a student in Orissa. He believes that nothing can be as uplifting as a good outdoor run. But that's not possible so he tries to make the most of his home and hospital gym. These days he has his eyes set on the Nin-

Diet is as much a part of Dr Panda's fitness regime as his workouts. After a breakfast of egg whites and whole wheat toast, there are no cereals in his meals

tendo 'Wii Fit', a new fitness video game, which his colleague, interventional cardiologist Dr Sudhir Vaishnav, has been raving about. The game makes users practice yoga, aerobics, muscle stretches and balance oriented games whilst

standing on a console the size of two textbooks stacked side by side with a virtual personal trainer pushing them hard.

Diet is as much a part of Dr Panda's fitness regime as his workouts. After a breakfast of egg whites and whole wheat toast, there are no cereals in his meals. He has a cream-less vegetable soup and a sprout salad for lunch and dinner, provided he can spare time for them. Tea or coffee are just for social occasions a few times a month and the only munchies allowed are dry fruits; a tiny packet is always in his briefcase. "I try to maintain a well-balanced diet with more protein and less carbohydrates and fats," he says. "I do indulge myself on weekends though."

Dr Panda believes in staying mentally fit too. He reads newspapers, medical journals, management books and biographies regularly. The classic self-help book *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen is at his bedside currently.

"It is important to keep both the body and the brain active," he says.

— Neha Bhayana

"Singing helps me block negative thoughts"

DR ASHOK SETH, Chairman, Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre, New Delhi



'MY TIME'
Dr Seth learns Hindustani classical music and does *riyaz* with his guru for two hours every week

awards and prattles on about the CD album his *guruji* insists he cut by the end of the year. "The CD will be a *ghazal* album, but despite *guruji's* confidence, I'm still a little nervous," he confides. A concert is in the offing in January 2009, the money from which will be used to treat poor heart patients.

Despite a 14-hour work day, Dr Seth manages to fit in an hour of exercise every day, with 30 minutes on the cross trainer and half an hour of weight training. "I prefer the gym, where I can focus on the regimen better, but it's difficult to find the time. Now I exercise at home, where I can multi-task, if needed," says Dr Seth, 53.

Singing even finds its way into his exercise schedule, with Dr Seth usually using the karaoke option on his iPod to sing along with while he exercises. "It helps me block out negative thoughts and helps my mind be at peace," he explains.

The doctor is also a certified scuba diver and takes a week off every year to indulge his hobby. He has dived in the Great Barrier Reef, Maldives and Mauritius.

Dr Seth's day begins at 9 am and goes on indefinitely, sometimes up till 2 am. "I need four-and-a-half hours of sleep, which makes it easier for me to pack things in. My cath lab work begins at 1 pm but pack-up time is open-ended, depending on the number of patients. It can go up to 2 am and my family hates it. I do it thrice a week, so it is manageable," he says.

He would be happier if he were five kg lighter but says it's impossible given his eating habits. "I'm a muncher and have no food discipline. I'm lucky to have amazing cholesterol levels naturally; so what I eat doesn't really affect my health, which is perhaps why I've never tried hard enough," he says.

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Dr Seth is also a certified scuba diver and takes a week off every year to indulge in his hobby. He has dived in the Great Barrier Reef, Maldives and Mauritius

IN THE business of life and death, mobile phones are never switched off. Dr Ashok Seth's phone, however, is off for two hours every week. That's the time when the celebrated cardiologist learns Hindustani classical music and does *riyaz* with his guru. "Those two hours are 'my time' when my phone is off, there are no interruptions and nothing exists for me but the music," says Dr Seth, a celebrated cardiologist who has several recognitions cluttering his walls, including a Padma Shree.

His love for music is apparent when he brushes aside discussions about his