

My Own Wellness Story

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I have been a pediatric emergency physician for 15 years. I still remember my first day rotating through the emergency department as a pediatric resident. I loved it. I knew it was my calling from that very first day. I graduated from one of the busiest emergency departments in the country and then worked in both academic and community EDs. I was fortunate to work with the best in the field, and was enjoying every bit of it until I had a personal crisis. My Mom, whom I adored, was diagnosed with a progressive neurodegenerative disorder and my life changed drastically. I suddenly had two jobs, one in the ED and another at home. My sister and I took turns caring for our Mother. Many times I worked graveyard shifts and then spent the next day caring for her. Sometimes I had to have others cover a shift because of an acute emergency. I paid those back, of course, but I was fortunate to have excellent and supportive colleagues. As Mom's disease progressed I hired a caregiver, but I was still the major decision maker and it wore me down physically and emotionally.

Although I was initially able to manage both work and Mom, I started to feel physically exhausted and knew I had to change my lifestyle. First, I started eating healthy, including more fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats in my diet such as ghee, coconut oil, and nuts. I also realized that it wasn't just what I ate, but how and when that made me feel better, so I became mindful of my eating. I also made sleep a priority. On the days I wasn't in the ED I went to bed early. That was a huge adjustment because I liked to stay up with friends and family, but I realized that adequate sleep translates into better mental alertness and stuck to it. I started meditating, and that worked wonders. I attended a mindfulness/meditation class and started practicing meditation in ten minute sessions. Honestly, out of those ten minutes I managed to focus on my breathing for maybe two minutes, but the cool thing about meditation is that you don't have to fight

those thoughts. I just let them pass, and felt thoroughly rested after each ten minute session. I also continued to practice yoga. I am fortunate to have learned Hatha yoga at the age of ten. Yoga is a very rewarding mind/body/spirit exercise. Pranayama, or the breath work of yoga postures, is the connection or bridge between body, mind, and spirit. Yoga is a sort of meditation because it forces you to concentrate on breath – our life force. Yoga brought more self-awareness. I was more conscious of my own being and of what needed attention, like my emotional state or my physical aches and pains. Because my awareness was drawn to these things, I could direct effort to mending them. Yoga made me more calm, more focused, and more content with my situation. It empowered me to face life's challenges and has yet to fail me.

My dearest mom recently transitioned. It was a sad moment to see her go, but I'm proud that my sister and I took good care of her in our home for ten years, and she died peacefully with us chanting spiritual hymns beside her. That is the way I wanted her to be received by God.

I continue with my wellness initiatives and continue to reap benefits. I incorporate self-care practices in my daily routine. In addition to making mindful food choices I also eat mindfully – meaning I spend time eating and enjoying food without rushing through meals. I continue to practice meditation for at least ten minutes a day, and do yoga for at least 20 minutes a day, which helps me connect with body, mind, and spirit. Finally, at the end of each day I say a prayer of thanks.

Life happens to all of us in different ways, but we all face challenges. Good and bad times are both part of life. It is important for us to be physically, mentally, and emotionally ready to face those challenges with resilience and emerge intact and healthy. ■

AAEM18 Wellness Activities

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