

Take an active role in your health

By Karla Andrews

It is early in the year and many individuals are focusing on the New Years' resolutions they made pertaining to their health. I am a strong supporter of improvements in health and wellness no matter what time of year! I encourage people to keep the focus on themselves and not the calendar. Improvements in one's health through conversations and interactions with various health professionals, or lifestyle changes, typically take place over months and years. Not days and weeks. It is a journey. Not a sprint.

In speaking with a dentist friend of mine, we spoke of the rewarding feeling of seeing people improve their health after heeding the advice of the professionals working with them. Certainly care providers, such as dentists, offer tips and recommendations for their patients. An orthopaedic surgeon might take time to educate an individual suffering from knee osteoarthritis about factors that can influence progression of the disease. These conversations are important in having individuals take an active role in bettering their health.

This is also a very regular part of receiving care from a physiotherapist. Physiotherapists are somewhat infamous for giving their patients "homework." This can include things such as ideas to improve posture or walking ability, strengthening or flexibility exercises or activities to sharpen one's balance. However, educating individuals about their condition or injury and what is appropriate management is often a significant part of the client-therapist interaction. More and more commonly, physiotherapists, including myself, are working with individuals in a preventative role, more frequently referred to as prehabilitation.

I recently worked with a woman who was informed she had low bone mass in her hips after having a bone density test. She is a fit lady in her mid 60s whose family doctor suggested she connect with a clinician who is knowledgeable in osteoporosis and appropriate exercise prescription. I was pleased to see that a family doctor was prescribing exercise in the management of her low bone density and that the patient was acting on that advice.

Just as my dentist friend knows when his patients are heeding his advice to floss regularly and brush appropriately – and when they're not – physiotherapists are aware of when their patients do their homework faithfully.

Sometimes it's challenging to do the homework physiotherapists assign. And, we appreciate that sometimes things get hectic and such work is put off in spite of good intentions.

However, the rewards for following the 'apple-a-day' type advice offered when you are receiving healthcare advice are ample. If you work with your physiotherapist or other healthcare professional, you will reap wellness returns more quickly and

thoroughly than if you're a passive care recipient and that's a resolution to stick with year in and year out.

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