



Hope may not be the best component of an exercise regimen

Judging by the crowd and the difficulty in finding a locker at my gym on January 1, a lot of people are serious about their 2016 New Year's resolution to exercise and lose weight. But as most of us have experienced personally and professionally, embarking on a well-intended effort to exercise in the hope of losing weight more often results in frustration than a trip to the store to buy smaller-sized clothes.

The frequent answer to the question "What did the doctor say at your visit?" provides a partial explanation of this phenomenon: "Nothing, just that I should exercise and lose weight" is the usual hackneyed response. Nothing—as in nothing unexpected, nothing significant, and nothing specific was said. It is with this lack of specific advice that I feel many of us let our patients down.

We admonish patients to eat fewer calories, avoid the evil carbs, walk 10,000 steps, ride a bike, use the elliptical, or swim three times a week. There is a concrete but broad nature to these suggestions, but there is also a familiarity and a lack of specificity that leaves patients feeling that there is no science behind them. And the truth is that many of us are not comfortable enough with current data from our exercise physiology colleagues to have a detailed discussion with our patients that pairs their specific goals with an exercise regimen and diet most likely to be beneficial. We may fear sounding like the morning talk show doctors, offering sound bites instead of engaging in an evidence-based dialogue with our patients.

Many of our patients cannot afford a personal trainer to guide and cajole them through a successful regimen—assuming that they, or we, can separate myth and fact and choose an appropriate trainer. We should try to be their guide and sounding board as well as coach and cheerleader.

On page 141 in this issue of the *Journal*, John and Christopher Higgins present a primer on the background information to use when talking with our patients about starting an exercise program focused on weight loss. They provide useful references that support specific approaches to achieve realistic expectations, and they review and compare various strategies.

I'm sure by March it will again be easier to find a locker at my gym. And I hope by then that my new workout plan will be more scientifically based, as well as a bit more effective. Even data-based hope springs eternal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brian Mandell".

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