

# STRENGTHENING YOUR LEGAL PRACTICE BY STRENGTHENING YOURSELF

BY KENDRA G. BERTSCHY, ESQ.



Many attorneys are guilty of using the excuse that there are not enough hours in the day to go to the gym. In the legal profession,

we work long hours, and it can be overwhelming at times to find time for a regular workout routine between writing emergency motions and last-minute crucial client calls. We've all heard that exercise and we know that physical activity is necessary to stay healthy, but it is easy to fall into the trap of believing it is too arduous or that attorneys have too many other things to worry about in order to exercise. As a result, attorneys suffer from myriad symptoms, including neck pain, migraines, lack of focus, lack of energy and even debilitating lower back pain. This article discusses simple ways for lawyers to increase focus and energy while relieving stress and pain.

As we are all aware, the legal profession can be extremely stressful. Whether dealing with companies worth millions of dollars or holding someone's future in your hands, the stakes in our profession can be very demanding. Recent studies found that attorneys are increasingly experiencing high rates of depression and substance use addiction due to job-related chronic stress.<sup>1</sup> Because of

this, a National Task Force was created to promote awareness of the issue and provide recommendations to improve the well-being of attorneys nationwide.<sup>2</sup>

The task force found that "failure to prioritize physical activity is harmful to an attorney's mental health and cognitive functioning."<sup>3</sup> Researchers have found that physical activity "may be an especially effective form of recovery for people performing mentally demanding work – like lawyers."<sup>4</sup> Attorneys need to strive to incorporate exercise into their daily schedules.

Furthermore, the task force cautioned that an attorney's well-being should be considered as part of an attorney's ethical duty of competence.<sup>5</sup> According to the Nevada Rules of Professional Conduct Rule 1.1: "A lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation." Thus, not only is exercise important for one's health, but an attorney may have an ethical duty to spend more time focusing on his or her well-being through physical activity.

Fitness trainer Glenn Dawson<sup>6</sup> has worked with numerous attorneys throughout his professional career.<sup>7</sup> Having been in the fitness industry for the past nine years, he has found that many attorneys suffer from similar issues. His attorney-clients generally suffer from tight trapezoids, hunched shoulders, collapsed cores and neck pain due to so much time spent sitting. These injuries and the accompanying pain are the result of years spent sitting in chairs – from spending countless hours studying in law school to spending hours analyzing cases and drafting motions while hunched over a desk.

In order to be able to get the most out of any exercise routine, we have to work on our body optimization in order to overcome our muscular imbalances. Dawson recommends three simple tips attorneys can add to their daily routines in order to maximize their limited time.

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## 1. Focus on Proper Posture

Throughout the day, Dawson recommends that attorneys focus on their posture. This can be accomplished while sitting at a desk or standing in the courtroom. He suggests that attorneys make a habit of periodically taking a few minutes during the day to work on proper posture. Being mindful of your posture will help to draw your shoulders down away from your ears, alleviating the stress in your shoulders.

## 2. Add Two Exercises to Your Routine

The most important two exercises that Dawson suggests for all attorneys are underhanded rows and back lunges.

When doing an underhanded, bent-over row, it is important to keep your shoulders down in place. You can start by doing this exercise using suspension-training equipment or a dumbbell. The goal is to set your shoulders back. For this exercise, start by standing tall, while holding a barbell in your hands with your palms facing up. Dawson cautions that you should make sure to keep a flat back while doing this exercise.

For back lunges, he suggests starting with no weights, in order to allow you to focus on your form first. This exercise works on low back and blood flow issues. While doing back lunges, make sure to start with your feet shoulder-width apart before taking a large step back.

## 3. Foam Rolling and Stretching

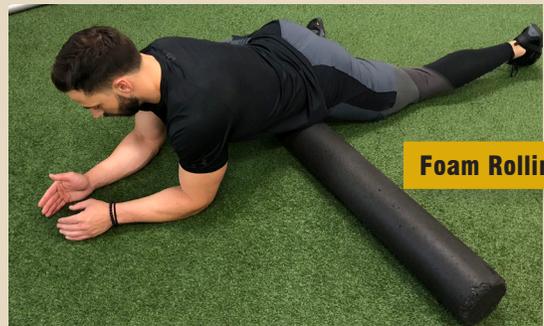
Dawson's last recommendation is one you can do at home: foam rolling and stretching. Dawson believes that proper foam rolling and stretching on a daily basis is the most crucial aspect of any exercise routine. Even if you do not have time to go to the gym, he argues that you can add foam rolling and stretching into your daily routine. The purpose of this practice is to help make sure that your body is moving correctly. If you do not have proper alignment, you will be unable to get the most out of any exercises. Dawson cautions that someone can spend hours at the gym without seeing the anticipated or expected results because of muscular imbalances. This can be easily resolved by adding stretching and foam rolling to your routine.



Fitness trainer Glenn Dawson demonstrates the underhanded row.



The lunge



Foam Rolling

## Additional Benefits of Exercising

Dawson also recommends making exercising a priority as a way “to make sure that your career does not own you.”<sup>8</sup> Making small changes, including exercising regularly and improving your eating habits, will provide a dramatic increase in productivity. Dawson has found that clients who learn to incorporate a basic fitness program into their lives not only look and feel healthier, but also become more successful. Strengthening your self-worth and confidence leads to greater success in the courtroom and will also attract more clientele. **NL**

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1. See National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change*, A.B.A., 1 (Aug. 14, 2017), <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/images/abanews/ThePathToLawyerWellBeingReportRevFINAL.pdf>.
2. *Id.* at 3.
3. *Id.* at 53.
4. *Id.*
5. *Id.* at 9.
6. Glenn Dawson is a co-owner of Reset U Fitness. For more information please visit <http://www.resetufitness.com>.
7. Interview with Glenn Dawson, Reset U Fitness (Mar. 2, 2018).
8. *Id.*