

After the Bell Podcast: Health and Fitness for Teachers **Andrea Brennan, Practicing Kinesiologist at Kinected Strength**

Over the years at Kinected Strength, we've had the pleasure of working with many teachers, from kindergarten to highschool.

Common physical ailments/issues that teachers face:

Stress is the most common issue that we see in teachers. Teachers are naturally caring and giving by nature. The job doesn't stop after the bell. Furthermore, the demands of the job have changed in recent years. High stress, burnout, poor sleep are major concerns for our teachers today.

Teachers are required to sit and stand for long periods, lift objects, bend down to assist small children and reach overhead. The physical demands that the job places on your body can lead to repetitive stress injuries, most commonly, the back, shoulder, hips and neck.

What can teachers do to keep themselves physically healthy to avoid on the job injuries? Injuries, aches and pains are avoidable and repairable with the right interventions.

1. Exercise:

Best way to avoid or overcome an injury is to become more physically resilient against the forces you encounter in your everyday life. The best way to achieve this is through progressive strength training. Even, If you don't exercise, a small introduction of movement can be profound. There are so many benefits to exercise both physical (disease prevention, longevity and immune function) and mental (improved mood and energy, reduced stress and anxiety)

2. Nutrition

A good diet can significantly impact your overall health. However, knowing what to eat can be confusing and intimidating. There are many options from Mediterranean to Paleo. Just like your exercise plan, the best thing to do is keep it simple. Focus on eating more protein (1g per 0.75-1g of bodyweight) and fiber (25-30g/day), drinking enough water and avoiding ultra processed foods. How you eat should be sustainable and realistic. It should include foods that you enjoy and perhaps, the odd glass of wine or beer.

3. Stress management:

Stress can significantly impact your overall health. Building healthy habits and support systems can counteract the stresses you may face. Talking to friends, getting outside, mediation, and improving sleep can be incredibly helpful tools.

What does being fit mean to you?

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Fitness and health are two sides of the same coin. It is so much more than how lean you are or how far you can run. Fitness is multidimensional. In order to be truly fit you need sufficient strength, cardiovascular fitness, muscle mass, balance and range of motion.

How does fitness/wellness change as we age?

Fitness becomes more of a necessity as you age. When we are young most things are easier, including fitness. Between 30-40yrs, we start to lose muscle mass, power, strength etc. Sarcopenia (age related muscle loss) impacts your functionality, risks for disease and quality of life. With no intervention, every year we can potentially lose 1% in muscle size, 1-3% in strength and 3-4% in power. This decline is not inevitable. With the right interventions, we can maintain or even build muscle and strength at any age.

Many people have good intentions to keep fit/well but they get derailed. Is there a way to prevent this?

Falling off the wagon is far more common than you think. Here are some ways you can stay on track:

1. Have a plan:

In order to have long term success, you need to have a realistic and sustainable plan that encourages consistency and promotes progressive overload. Teachers, by nature, are planners. Lesson plans are essential to your students' success and your fitness should be no different. Just like in the classroom, your plan should be specific to your needs and flexible enough to allow for modifications. If you are new to exercise, then working with a professional can help you formulate a plan that works for you.

2. Start small:

When starting a fitness plan, start small. Prioritize consistency over intensity. Building strength doesn't have to be stressful. Often, slowing down and refining movement quality will lead to better long term results.

3. Book the time:

Sometimes, life can get in the way of your health journey. Book your workouts like any other health related appointment. Prioritize your fitness, you're worth it!

4. Realistic Goals:

People typically fall off the wagon because they don't see results. Remember this is a marathon not a sprint. Building a plan around realistic results can help you stay on track. Refining what success means to you can be tremendously powerful. Maybe losing 10lbs really isn't that important to you after all. Perhaps your goal is to travel or pick up your grandkids comfortably. Finding goals that align with your core values can help to make your workouts non-negotiable.

5. Make it enjoyable:

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If you don't enjoy the journey, you won't stick with it. Find your fun! Perhaps running isn't for you but pickleball is more up your alley. Having a training partner or group to help keep you accountable and your workouts more social.

How does someone regain their fitness/wellness, post injury or after a prolonged sedentary period?

There are many reasons for a prolonged break from exercise like surgery, pregnancy, long term illness. This can be a delicate time to return to fitness. At all times, your safety is the priority. Working with a kinesiologist or healthcare practitioner can help you navigate this time. You will be starting with a new baseline. Be kind to yourself and know that progress is not linear

What do you think teachers should focus on (barring any specific injuries they may have) when choosing how to improve their fitness/wellness?

Teachers have enough stress on their plate. Improving your health should not be adding to your stress. Where possible, take a holistic approach to fitness and wellness.

For the best results, follow a well rounded exercise program that encourages consistency (over intensity), progressive overload, variability and challenges all aspects of fitness (mobility, strength, cardiovascular etc)

Are there exercises that you suggest teachers do regularly for maintaining their wellness/fitness?

There is not a "one size fits all" when it comes to exercise prescription. Teachers may benefit from focusing on Functional Movements (squat, hinge, carry, push, pull etc). This form of exercise mimics movements used in everyday life. Improving functionality is linked to longevity.

Are there specific pieces of equipment that you would recommend?

Kettlebells are like the "Swiss Army Knife" of exercise equipment. They are the only piece of equipment that trains cardio, strength, balance, stability, core strength and power.

There are many ways we can improve strength; bands, free weights and barbells, but learning how to move your body can be just as beneficial.

Can you think of things that a teacher can do with their students to help not only the teacher, but the whole class?

Participate where possible; model good movement. If you move, move well, express enjoyment while doing so, children are more likely to follow in your footsteps. Movement is a language and the more exposure children have at a young age the better. Keep your lessons fun and playful. Take your class outside where possible!

Try to take breaks from sitting. We are not designed to be sitting for long periods and children are no exception. Some children need more movement as an outlet for their energy.

What would be your number one piece of advice you have for teachers in the classroom?

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Teaching is not an easy profession so take care of yourself. Exercise can be a great tool in your defense against the physical and emotional stresses of teaching. Start off small, seek help and support if you need.

For more information contact: kinectedstrength@gmail.com

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