

Marathon-running MD helps patients win at weight loss

By SIMONE JOSEPH
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Dr. Steve Hirsch reached a realization early on in his career as a family doctor.

He sometimes advised patients to lose weight, assuming they would follow his advice. But often they did not have the tools needed to lose excess pounds, increase exercise and improve overall lifestyle.

So he created a tool. Last November he released a book that explains the program, titled: "Health First: Winning at Weight Loss and Wellness."

For the last 30 years, Dr. Hirsch has practised family medicine in Mississauga and Oakville.

He is on staff in the department of primary care at Trillium Health Partners, and is also a lecturer in the department of family and community medicine at the University of Toronto.

The Thornhill resident has modified and refined his philosophy over 25 years of practice.

"The focus is not just about looking better, but taking charge of your health," Dr. Hirsch said. His program is also about giving people greater control over disease prevention, he said.

Dr. Hirsch practices what he preaches. He has run 24 marathons, including five in Boston, and is also

an avid cyclist.

As a child, Dr. Hirsch watched as his mother battled a disabling form of rheumatoid arthritis. That experience made him want to stay as healthy as possible.

His father, Hymie, also motivated him to strive for good health.

Five years after he married, his father was at least 40 pounds overweight.

"I thought, you know what? I don't

want to go there," Dr. Hirsch said.

Today, Dr. Hirsch is 10 pounds lighter than he was when he was age 18.

"I have to work at this. It is not a constant struggle, but I pay attention. I focus on sugar and fat content," he said.

Dr. Hirsch says he's not perfect, admitting that, from time to time, he indulges in unhealthy food.

He says he became a family doctor because he wanted to prevent disease and has been trying to help patients do this since 1983.

Dr. Hirsch has seen the program work with his patients.

He points to the example of one of his patients — the CEO of a large company — who travels 44 weeks out of the year.

Dr. Hirsch told his patient to lose 40 pounds and his answer was: "No way I can do that. I am living in hotels and restaurants."

The patient felt he had no control

over what he ate.

But Dr. Hirsch taught him the program and he dropped those 40 pounds.

"The program gives people control and debunks some of the crazy myths," he said.

It debunks myths such as you should not eat after 6 p.m. It also teaches people how to be smart consumers, for example, not believing a food product is healthy just because it is marketed that way, when it is really loaded with sugar.

He teaches people how to focus on what they eat to prevent mindless eating. Patients have told him the program helps them read and interpret food labels.

You can buy his book at Amazon.ca or iBooks on iPad or it can be special ordered at Chapters or Indigo.

For a full description of Dr. Hirsch's program, go to healthfirstandwellness.com.