

# Exercise is

Many people have the misconception that exercise has to be unpleasant to be worthwhile. Think “no pain, no gain,” the mantra of weight lifters and body builders. But others who understand that regular exercise is basic healthcare believe the opposite is true.

“To be useful, exercise needs to be fun and relaxing,” says Mark Cucuzzella, MD, family medicine physician and associate professor of family medicine in the Eastern Division of the School of Medicine. “I like to use the word physical activity, because exercise, to me, is

something that is forced on you in addition to all the other things you have to do all day.”

Dr. Cucuzzella adheres to the novel idea that exercise in itself is medicine. “Staying healthy is all about how you live, what you eat, how you move, all the things you do all day that promote wellness,” he said. “My idea of a good level of exercise is if you’ve exercised properly for your daily session, it should feel easy enough that, if you had to, you could turn around and do it again.”

Cucuzzella practices what he preaches. He loves the

outdoors, and his exercise of choice is running. He’s been a competitive runner for 30 years or so, and he has completed more than 60 marathons.

“For me, running is the activity that I like,” he says. But, lifelong physical activity, just moving, is the point. “Moving at a certain pace and for a certain amount of time as a prescription is what’s important.”

And, he says his motto is not “no pain, no gain.” It’s more like: “No pain? Hey, thanks!”

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Written by Michelle Moore

# Medicine

More than 3,000 people took Dr. Mark Cucuzzella's prescription for health.



Freedom's Run participants cross the Potomac River.

## Champion of the Eastern Panhandle

Cucuzzella directs the family medicine clerkship, taking charge of third-year medical students in their first exposure to being a family doctor. He is one of the “clinic champions” at Harpers Ferry Family Medicine, where he helped transform the center into a nationally recognized patient-centered medical home. (For more about medical homes, see page 24.)

Cucuzzella is also a champion for the people of the Harpers Ferry area. His interest in wellness and keeping fit have led to creating outdoor activities for school children, building hiking trails, and co-sponsoring the largest running race event in the state. He is a fitness leader, teaching running workshops to help others learn proper technique and avoid injury. As a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserves, Cucuzzella is the coach and captain of the Air Force Marathon Team, and he designs programs for the Air Force to reduce running injuries in military personnel.

“When Mark Cucuzzella responded to our faculty recruitment ad, I knew that he was going to be a different type of physician,” says Konrad Nau, MD, recently named leader of the Eastern Division. “Time has proven how correct those initial impressions were. Mark’s engagement of the community in participating in physical activity has been an inspiration to us all.”

Cucuzzella was instrumental in creating “Tiger on the Trail,” a hiking program for Jefferson County Middle School students. The program gets kids outdoors into the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park where they can hike around and connect with nature. The hope is that through this guided exposure these children will develop an interest in environmental conservation, and the physical activity helps fight childhood obesity. Best of all, it’s fun.



Tigers on the trail.

## Freedom’s Run

One of Cucuzzella’s greatest community contributions has been helping to establish a day of foot races through the four national parks in eastern West Virginia and nearby Maryland.



Freedom’s Run, as the race is called, is in its fourth year, and the event includes a marathon, a half marathon, a 10K race, a 5K race, and a fun run for children. Runners follow the race routes through historic Harpers Ferry, along the C&O Canal, across the Antietam National Battlefield, and on the Potomac Heritage Trail. Runners from all over the U.S. and abroad come to compete and enjoy the October scenery and raise funds for sustainable trail and garden building in elementary schools in Jefferson County. Hundreds of local families and children come out for the day. In 2011, 3,000 people from 43 states participated in Freedom’s Run events.

Cucuzzella says that “huge teams of volunteers” help to make the race possible, along with supportive sponsors, like the National Park Service and the Benedum Foundation.

“You would never know by speaking with Mark that he is a near-world-class athlete,” said Dr. Nau. “He is still winning marathons and placing among the top finishers at the Boston Marathon, but he has integrated his athletic passions with his family and medical profession as well as anyone could imagine.”



Mark Cucuzzella, MD

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— Konrad Nau, MD

Dr. Nau recognizes Cucuzzella's unique outlook and the important work he is doing for the people in their region, leading by example instead of merely passing out advice.

“It is all too easy for doctors to sit in our clinics and prescribe exercise to our patients,” says Nau. “Only Dr. Cucuzzella could practice family medicine full-time and teach and organize West Virginia’s largest running event. He is the kind of doctor that we hope inspires our next generation of physicians to answer the national call to serve as primary care physicians.”

This year’s Freedom’s Run is October 13, 2012. To learn more, visit [freedomrun.org](http://freedomrun.org).

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**“Dr. Mark encouraged me to take care of and take time for myself. ... His consistent checking in, cheering on, and genuine concern as a doctor, a coach, and overall great guy helped me change my mindset. He is a gift to the community and a huge asset to WVU.”**

— Susan Reichel, Shepherdstown, WV

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