

'At Times, We Stop Planning for Our Own Good'

Obesity has been called a national health crisis. In response, organizations dedicated to its study and treatment are convening more and larger conferences — but ironically, the meeting professionals who plan them are among those most at risk for obesity themselves. That's because they face the near-constant challenge of late nights, long hours, extensive travel, stress, and on-the-go eating.

In this go-go profession, it's easy to let healthy eating and exercise fall to the wayside, and that increases the risk for weight gain and obesity. To help planners combat these risk factors, *Convene* spoke to one expert and two industry insiders.

What about this industry makes it different from any other busy career?

JIM KELLEY We're basically in the hospitality industry, and it's a 24/7 industry. There is so much that's pressed into the schedule, it makes it hard to maintain sleep patterns as well as exercise patterns. We're working long hours and grabbing something to eat on the go. It's like, "The cobbler's son has no shoes." We're a planning industry, but at times we stop planning for our own good. We would think nothing if an attendee said, "I need this." We'd make it happen. But then we don't do as good of a job planning for and taking care of our own health and fitness.

KIM BERCOVITZ Meeting planners often prioritize serving attendees over taking care of themselves. Putting yourself first is not a narcissistic thing. If you put yourself first and take care of yourself first, then you will be able to



THE PRO Kim Bercovitz, Ph.D., is the president and chief exercise officer of X bytes, which provides on-demand video fitness breaks for conferences and meetings. She has 25 years of experience in corporate fitness and health/exercise research.



THE FANATIC Cathy Mason, CMP, is a 30-year industry veteran and self-described fitness fanatic. She is president of The Mason Group — Global Event Management, and a regular triathlon competitor.



THE CONVERT Jim Kelley, vice president of Industry Relations for Production Resource Group LLC, lost 80 pounds in one year — all while keeping his regular schedule of 140 days a year on the road.

take care of your guests. And the whole culture of wellness will be infused in the conference.

What advice do you have for eating healthfully while on the road or on site?

JK It's not impossible, it just takes more planning. Airports are probably the biggest challenge, because the choices aren't as good. If I know I have a layover, I'll go to that airport's website to see what the food options are, instead of stopping at the first place I see. With a little bit of planning, I'll know that by Gate A there is a salad bar or restaurant with healthy choices. On site, most hotels have coffeemakers now, so it's easy to make a bowl of oatmeal or cup of soup. The other thing I learned is, never go to a reception hungry because the food there usually isn't the healthiest. If there is time, I'll actually order room service before the reception.

CATHY MASON I bring some fresh fruit or almonds in my carry-on. I also bring a protein/carbohydrate powder I can mix with water. It gives me all the nutrition I need, and I can drink that on the

go if healthy meals aren't available or I don't have time to go find one.

So many functions involve alcohol. How can meeting professionals avoid the calories and effects of social drinking?

JK It's more and more accepted not to drink, but it's hard in sales because you don't want your client drinking alone. If it's important to stay out and network, at some point switch to water. Or order seltzer water with a lime. Most people can't tell the difference between a gin-and-tonic and a seltzer.

There is so little down time. How can planners stay fit on the road?

CM On site, we all learn the back-of-house shortcuts. Don't take them. Take the stairs or take the long way. All that walking adds up. If you don't feel comfortable running outside or exercising in front of clients in the fitness center, it's easy to get a workout in in your room. I bring a travel yoga mat and two exercise CDs I can play on my laptop.

KB Pack a resistance band. It doesn't take up any room, and you can do

strengthening and stretching exercises in your room. Don't worry if it's a short workout. Just a minute here, a minute there — every minute matters.

JK Put your tablet on the treadmill and read through emails while you're walking. A lot of what we do as an industry is reading and keeping up on trends, and a lot of that can be done during a brisk walk on a treadmill. Instead of catching the shuttle, walk back to the hotel. Invite a client or contact to walk with you. Those walks can be really productive work sessions.

Relentless schedules can make it hard to be "good" all the time. How do you balance healthy goals with busy reality?

JK The key is everything in moderation. I just got back from an event in Mexico. I took one afternoon and lay by the pool drinking boat drinks. I didn't feel guilty because I don't do it every day. If you have a bad day professionally, you don't give up. You adjust, you course-correct. It's not the end of the world. The bigger picture is, at some point you have to decide what's better for you in the long run.