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Surgeons should do warm-up exercises

12:23 PM, February 9, 2009



Surgeons.

The increasing use of robotic and minimally invasive surgery means doctors today need to have superb manual dexterity and fine-motor skills. These operations involve inserting a tiny camera and instruments into small openings in the body to cut, remove or mend tissues. A new study suggests that surgeons may benefit from pre-operative warm-up exercises to prepare them for the cognitive and physical challenges ahead.

The study, from researchers at Arizona State University, found that 15 to 20 minutes of simple exercises leads to a substantial increase in the proficiency of surgical skills by raising alertness and protecting against fatigue. The study involved 46 surgeons who practiced a series of standardized exercises involving such things as hand movement, tool movement and cognitive skills. The surgeons were then tested by performing a difficult procedure in a simulation. The study is published in this month's edition of the [Journal of the American College of](#)

"Warm-up exercises are a 'common sense' practice in many high-stakes professions, such as professional sports or dance," said the lead author of the study, Kanav Kahol, in a news release. "This study begins to lay a scientific foundation for adopting this approach in routine surgical practice, which has become increasingly rigorous and demanding."

-- Shari Roan

Photo: A surgical instrument that is attached to a robotic arm. The robotic arm represents the surgeon's hand. Credit: Al Seib / Los Angeles Times

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Our Bloggers

Tami Dennis

Tami Dennis, who takes the word "skeptical" to previously uncharted territory, is the Times' Health and Science editor. She's adamant that pitches promoting awareness days, weeks or months are, by their nature, non-stories. And, because she's an adult, she refuses to use words like "veggies," "tummy" and "yummy."

Rosie Mestel

Rosie Mestel, deputy Health and Science editor, studied genetics before abandoning flies, fungi and DNA for health/medical writing. Her hero is the biologist Ernst Haeckel, whose jellyfish paintings inspired snazzy chandeliers. Her favorite toast-spread is Marmite, a British delicacy made of yeast extract. Her least-favorite word is "millenniums."

Mary Engel

Mary Engel writes about infectious diseases and public health, and washes her hands as often as Lady Macbeth. She has reported for newspapers in Alaska and New Mexico -- and believes that journalists and scientists have in common an unquenchable curiosity and an abiding belief that answers beget more questions.

Melissa Healy

Melissa Healy is a staff writer for the Health section reporting from Washington D.C. Healy's a veteran of The Times' National staff, having covered the Pentagon, Congress, poverty and social welfare, the environment, and the White House before shifting to Health in 2003. She writes frequently about mental

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policy, prescription medication and ethics in medicine. More work than wellness freak, Healy chooses to believe in the health benefits of coffee and wine, and considers water a better work-out medium than beverage.

Karen Kaplan

Karen Kaplan covers genetics, stem cells and cloning. She and colleague Thomas H. Maugh II comprise about 25% of the unofficial MIT-Alumni-in-Journalism Club, and she is proud to have taken more math (5) than English (0) courses in college. Her contributions to Booster Shots will, she hopes, appear more frequently than postings to her mommy blog.

Thomas H. Maugh II

Thomas H. Maugh II has been a science and medical writer at the Times for 23 years. Before that, he was on the staff of the journal Science for 13 years. He has bachelor's degrees in English and chemistry from MIT and a doctorate in chemistry from UC Santa Barbara.

Shari Roan

After a brief stint as a sports writer, Shari Roan turned to health journalism and has covered the topic for The Times for 18 years. She is the author of three books and the mother of two daughters, both teenagers who refer to her as a "health freak." She likes to jog, watch baseball and is very happy that dark chocolate contains some health benefit.

Jeannine Stein

Jeannine Stein writes about fitness, sports medicine and obesity for the Health section. She's a gym rat from way back and never met an elliptical trainer she didn't like. Well, maybe one or two. She tempers exercise with a steady diet of reality television because she believes it's all about balance.

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