



# Extending Career Span and Performance

A Preventive Health Brief for Colorado Lawyers

BY OSWALDO GRENARDO

Lawyers are trained to identify risk, analyze facts, and protect clients from harm—yet they rarely apply those same instincts to themselves. Long hours, unrelenting stress, unpredictable schedules, and sedentary routines have become woven into the fabric of the profession. What were once warning signs are now accepted norms, and the consequences for personal health are profound.

Recent studies reveal that attorneys face elevated rates of hypertension, depression, anxiety, and substance use compared with similarly educated peers.<sup>1</sup> Those most adept at solving others' crises often postpone addressing their own until it's too late. In my practice caring

for attorneys, I've seen how small, strategic health choices can transform a career trajectory. Preventive medicine isn't merely protection against disease; it's an investment in focus, longevity, and performance. Consider this your 2026 "brief" on staying sharp, resilient, and healthy.

## 1. Keep Track of Your Numbers: The Lawyer's Preventive Health Checklist

You plan for every client, case, and deadline—your health deserves the same strategy. Preventive screenings work like legal discovery. They uncover problems before they become costly or irreversible.

These are the benchmarks every attorney should track and discuss with their physician:

### Heart and Metabolic Health

- Blood pressure: Get it measured at least yearly. High blood pressure is often symptom-free but remains one of the strongest predictors of heart attack and stroke.
- Cholesterol and lipids: Ask for a panel at your routine visit—or sooner if your risk is high. Knowing your baseline helps prevent long-term damage before it starts.
- Diabetes (A1C or fasting glucose): Screen yearly. Detecting prediabetes early allows lifestyle changes that prevent progression.

### Mind and Mood

- Mental health: Screen for depression and anxiety regularly. Therapy, counseling, or coaching can preserve clarity and resilience.
- Sleep: If you snore or wake feeling unrefreshed, discuss the possibility of sleep apnea with your physician. Restorative sleep sharpens focus and strengthens immunity.
- Substance use: Talk openly about alcohol, drug, and tobacco use. These are common, treatable health risks, and addressing them can protect the body, mind, and career.

### Cancer Prevention and Early Detection

- Breast cancer (women, and some men and transgender individuals): Get a mammogram every one to two years starting at 40, or earlier if you have a family history. Early detection remains one of the most effective lifesaving tools.
- Cervical cancer (anyone with a cervix): Schedule a Pap or HPV test every three to five years from ages 21 to 65. Regular screening can identify precancerous changes long before symptoms appear.
- Colorectal cancer: Begin screening at 45. Colonoscopy remains the gold standard for prevention and detection. This not only detects cancer but can prevent it by removing precancerous polyps.
- Prostate cancer (men and anyone with

a prostate): Talk with your physician at 50, or earlier if you're at higher risk. Early discussion helps tailor screening to your individual risk profile.

- Lung cancer: Ask about a yearly low-dose CT scan if you're 50 or older and smoke or recently quit. This test can catch disease when it's still curable.
- Family history: Share your family's health history with your doctor. Genetic counseling or testing can reveal inherited risks and guide preventive care.

## 2. The Subtle Yet Mighty Impact of Everyday Movement

Most lawyers spend eight to ten hours a day seated—drafting, reading, and thinking. That inactivity silently compounds risk. Recent evidence links prolonged sitting to a 16% higher risk of all-cause mortality and a 34% higher cardiovascular mortality.<sup>2</sup>

The fix isn't a marathon; it's consistency. A few micro-habits practiced daily can rewrite your health story:

- Take walk calls: convert one meeting a day into a 15-minute stroll.
- Follow the 50/10 rule: stand or stretch 10 minutes every hour.
- Strength-train twice weekly to preserve muscle and bone.
- Stretch nightly to release tension and prepare for sleep.

Even two days a week of 8,000 steps reduces long-term mortality risk.<sup>3</sup> Movement doesn't require perfection, just persistence.

## 3. Food That Fuels Focus

Attorneys often rely on caffeine, snacks, and late client dinners to power through the day. Over time, those habits deplete focus and amplify inflammation. Nutrition is the brain's fuel; choose wisely.

Try incorporating these high-impact habits into your routine:

- Include protein with every meal to sustain energy and decrease afternoon dips in energy.
- Load up on fruits, vegetables, and legumes, as fiber stabilizes blood sugar and reduces disease risk.

- Stay hydrated. Even mild dehydration can reduce mental performance by 10–15%.<sup>4</sup>
- Limit alcohol to one drink daily, but aim for a few alcohol-free days per week.

Food choices are foundational. They sharpen thinking, balance mood, and keep you performing at your peak.

## 4. Sleep as Strategy

If sleep were a prescription drug, it would be the most effective therapy available. Yet many lawyers sacrifice it first. Caffeine can heighten focus and stamina, but more than 400 mg a day—about four cups of coffee—tends to blur its benefits, unsettling sleep and raising stress hormones. Sleep loss erodes focus, disrupts hormonal balance, impairs immunity, and raises risk for obesity and heart disease.<sup>5</sup>

To restore quality sleep:

- Keep a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, even on weekends.
- Avoid screens 30 minutes before bed.
- Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.
- Avoid caffeine after 2 p.m.

Sleep is not idle time; it's maintenance for memory, creativity, and emotional control. Treat it as nonnegotiable.

## 5. The Resilience Clause: Managing Stress and Protecting Your Mind

True preventive care rests on resilience. Attorneys work under constant scrutiny from judges, clients, and colleagues. The ability to stay grounded under pressure is both a professional skill and a necessity.

Mindfulness, journaling, and gratitude aren't indulgences; they reshape brain circuits and reduce stress hormones.<sup>6</sup> Try inserting a one-minute pause between tasks or listening to a short guided meditation on your commute. These small habits can build psychological stamina.

In today's world, anxiety and depression are widespread, often hidden behind success. If you feel off or disconnected, reach out. Therapy isn't a sign of weakness; it's an act of mastery over your mind and emotions.

## 6. Building Your Network of Well-Being: Connectedness and Community

Strong social ties are medicine. Loneliness now ranks among the most significant public health risks, increasing mortality as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.<sup>7</sup> Deep relationships buffer stress, enhance longevity, and foster meaning. Invest in relationships that matter both inside and outside the legal world. Prioritize time with family, friends, colleagues, and community networks.

## 7. Annual Health Strategy: Care for Your Body Like You Do Your Practice

Every successful firm has a plan—quarterly reviews, metrics, measurable outcomes. Your body deserves the same. Schedule your annual physical each January and treat it like a client deadline.

Then create a one-page health plan that includes:

- One fitness goal (e.g., 150 minutes of weekly movement).
- One nutrition goal (e.g., three home-cooked meals per week).
- One mental health goal (e.g., regular mindfulness or counseling).
- One preventive goal (e.g., complete age-appropriate screenings).

Consistency compounds outcomes both professionally and physically.

## 8. The Silent Epidemic: Burnout and Its Toll


Burnout is more than fatigue. It's a physiological transformation. Chronic stress elevates cortisol, disrupts sleep, raises blood pressure, and fuels inflammation, paving the way for cardiovascular and metabolic disease. Recent multi-site surveys of lawyers show that large national samples of attorneys report substantial psychological distress—with more than 40% meeting criteria for moderate or serious distress in one analysis—alongside elevated rates of hazardous alcohol use compared with the general population.<sup>8</sup>

Burnout can creep in quietly, beginning as irritability, exhaustion, and detachment, and then building until these emotions overwhelm. Burnout doesn't just harm well-being; it erodes judgment, creativity, and passion for the work itself. Understanding the causes, warning signs,

and prevention strategies, both personally and within your firm, is essential. Left unchecked, burnout can intensify physical and mental health problems. Your best defense is proactive care: maintaining your screenings, protecting your boundaries, and treating health as a professional asset. What you can control—your habits, rest, and focus—forms the foundation for resilience and longevity in the legal profession.

### The Health Verdict

Lawyers understand precedent, and the precedent for attorney health has not been favorable. But that story can change. The same rigor and intellect that sustain your legal success can safeguard your well-being.

Preventive care isn't optional; it's an investment in your ability to lead, advocate, and live fully. As you plan the year ahead, treat your body and mind as your most valuable client. The case for prevention, quite literally, is airtight. 

For more well-being related strategies, visit the COLAP website at [www.coloradolap.org](http://www.coloradolap.org). Or contact COLAP at [info@coloradolap.org](mailto:info@coloradolap.org) or (303) 986-3345 to request a free, confidential well-being consultation.



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### NOTES

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*To promote well-being, resiliency, and competency throughout Colorado's legal community.*

The Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program (COLAP) is the free, confidential, and independent program for Colorado's legal community. COLAP offers free well-being consultations for: Stress & Burn-out \* Secondary Trauma & Compassion Fatigue \* Work-life balance \* Free ethics CLE presentations \* Improving well-being in the workplace \* Personal or professional issues \* Mental health, trauma, substance use, or addiction concerns \* Referrals to resources.

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