

SOMEBODY TOLD ME

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That my Fire Department physical is all that I need on a yearly basis.



False – *The fact is that although our FD physicals are very good, they do not do everything we need to have checked on a yearly basis. The FD physical concentrated on our cardiovascular system, but there was an old TV commercial that said we take care of all your parts. Having a primary physician is critical as we age. And, when you do visit them for a medical **be sure to advise them that you are a firefighter (career or volunteer)**. I know that my doctor changed his regular “protocol” to include testing not given to John Q. Public, and if needed will refer me to a specialist.*

I don't need to exercise, I'm in good shape for the shape I am in.



False – *Exercise does not have to be going to a gym, although there is benefit to it. Keeping our bodies moving is critical. For those of us who work in an office all day, we really don't move around as much as we should. In my case, I went from a field worker to a management level worker and spent most of my time in the office. I pretty much stopped any physical activity I was doing while in the field, and when I got home from work and took a nap. Don't get me wrong, naps aren't a bad thing. But exercise can be as easy as a walk around the block to keep moving. This was my biggest mistake. I never took 20 minutes to myself to do some sort of activity every day, which leaves me dealing with some sort of pain daily. If you feel you might need some extra help, most gyms have trainers which can cater to you and your needs.*

I can quit smoking anytime I want. I feel fine, and nobody in our family had cancer or heart disease.



False – *If you are one of the lucky ones who's live have never been touched by cancer (of some sort), or heart disease, I applaud you! But as we well know, that is far and few between. I really don't know anybody who hasn't had a bout with cancer or heart disease, even in my own family. Yes, smoking does cause cancer(s) to not only the lungs, but other places also. But even greater than that they are finding that smoking can be directly related to heart disease. I am a prior smoker, only for a couple of years as I was a senior in High School and everybody was doing it. It wasn't particularly hard for me to quit, because I was only doing it to be one of the guys. But, for so many, smoking is an addiction and has to be treated that way. Not many people can just quit "cold turkey" If you did, CONGRATULATIONS, you are one of the few who have. The longer you smoke, the harder is to quit. There is help out there. Nobody expects you do this alone! You will be surprised how much better you will feel without those TOXINS in your body. Breathing, stamina, general wellness, energy are all additional benefits to quitting.*

My body weight is fine. I just went to the doctor and my blood work is all fine, blood pressure is OK, and I passed my FD physical, and can do whatever I want.



FALSE – *This one is personal for me. I have been overweight for YEARS. As recommended above, I did see my doctor on a regular basis and always (for some reason) had good numbers on my blood work. Blood pressure on the other hand is another story. After seeing my cardiologist, my next stop was IHOP for a 5-pancake breakfast! Why not, my cholesterol was well under 200. But, what about the rest of me which I decided to ignore. Right now, I am going through some major spinal and orthopedic trouble which unfortunately is not going to go away. My heart might have been ok, but the constant strain on my back and orthopedics was, and still is constant. Right now, it is difficult for me to take a walk (something I always loved to do). Climbing stairs is like climbing a mountain! Over the past year I have lost almost 100 pounds, and still obese (how I hate that word)! I still have a road ahead of me, but turned on my GPS and now finding ways to deal with my weight. For me, a little to late. Within the last year, I have contracted Type II Diabetes and am being treated for it. You would think that after losing so much weight, that I would be feeling great, but the answer is NO. The damage to my back and hips is already there, so me and pain and constant companions. Working through it with pain management, acupuncture (yes, it does help)! And physical therapy so I can keep moving. Those knowing me, know that I am a proud member of my volunteer fire department going on 43 years now (time does fly). In the last year and a half, my back started to*

I can't get my legs up high enough to get into the cab, or on to the turntable, so I stopped driving. This is a long section, because it is one that directly affected yours truly. I am not the poster boy for weight loss, BUT can tell you from experience what damage it can do both physically and psychologically. And, I can't tell you any magical ways to lose weight, you are the only one that can advise yourself what to do. DO NOT do it without your doctor knowing and tracking you. There are some crazy things out there that are of no benefit, cost you a fortune, and honestly don't work. I am not a fan of surgery, but if YOU and your doctor agree, do it. If you still have questions, get a second opinion! They can talk about emotional eaters; I am also an emotional writer. Sorry if this ran a bit long, but as said, "been there, done that", and I would NEVER want to see anyone go through what I have.



True. *We are all human; it is OK not to be OK. As mentioned, I have been an active firefighter in my department for over 40 years. You can imagine (or maybe you can't) imagine the things that emergency workers Have seen over their tenure. Fire and emergencies do not discriminate whether you are a career or volunteer first responder. Mental illness is one of the biggest ways that we lose our members. As strong as we are, it's OK not to be OK. We see so much in what we do day to day. Many times, we "brush it off" as just another bad call and put it to the back of our minds, SOMETIMES, we can't. Paycheck or not! As said, we are all human. NO, we are NOT supposed to see some of the things we do. Back in the day (and not too long ago), our senior guys would say have a beer or smoke and the pain will go away. This is NOT the attitude today. Some guys would tell us, "If you can't take it, this is not for you and you should resign". Again, WRONG! We responded to that call because we are dedicated to our duty. Many times, we have no idea what we are going to see when we get there. I'll share one thing about 9/11 that is one of the things that will stay with me forever. I was Deputy Chief of my volunteer fire department at the time. Everybody knew what happened. When the call came to us from County dispatch, we all knew what happened, but had no idea what we would be called upon to do. I am so proud to say that when those alert tones went off, all 4 of our firehouses were filled with members ready, willing and able do to anything, anywhere. And we did. We could've ignored it because we knew what we faced ahead, but didn't. As Forrest Gump said, that's all I have to say about that. **The point here is to reach out for help!** I did. There is no shame, or weakness in anyone who is dealing with a situation of any kind (personal, family, career or anything). There are people there who can help. I don't know where I'd be today if I*

*didn't. Mental illness is just that, an illness, just like any other one. If you tell anyone (which you don't have to) that you are seeing a therapist or psychiatrist nobody should label you, or avoid you. I see my therapist and psychiatrist on a regular basis, and am not ashamed to say so. **If you ever have thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself or someone else reach out for help. There is a suicide hotline that you can call 24 / 7. Just call or text 988. You can even chat on their website, or call your therapist. Believe me, you are NOT alone! Don't suffer in silence like I did for so long!***

Let's finish up by looking at our emergency responses. There is so much that we can do differently to make sure "we come home", and it starts as soon as the radio alerts or the siren starts to blow.



You're a firefighter, you have to be there;

True, but to an extent. *When we respond, we have to be ready to act on whatever situation we arrive at. Our minds and bodies have to be ready for the fight of our life. Here is a mindset that I was taught in my first EMT class back in 1980, and I believe it still stands true today. "Every fire call we respond to is a working fire or worst scene you can imagine, until someone tells us otherwise". This sticks with me even today. We all get the automatic alarms, fender benders, smells and bells calls. Unfortunately, this is what goes through our minds as we respond, so we don't gear up for the "big one". So, when we arrive and it is, we are not properly prepared for what faces us. But, if we respond in keeping that statement in mind, we get off the rig and are ready, willing and able to face whatever is before us. I've seen this happen at least twice that I can comment on. You're a Chief and arrive at a fully involved gasoline tanker with structures involved. If you have the right mindset, you're ready and have ideas on what you want your arriving apparatus to do. You're immediately calling for more resources including foam units. If you are not in the right mindset, who knows what you will do.*

We have to think next of ourself. Hard to hear if you're a responder, but you can't be of any help if you are sick, or hurt. It happens to all of us. How many have gotten out of our sick beds with the flu and made the call. Since my injury, I had to change everything I did day to day when the radio sounded. It's called reality! Don't be part of the first in crew if you aren't fit for duty. Again, the only one who can recognize this is you! Many other things in life prevent us from making every call. They're obvious – family, work, travel, being out of town, the list continues. THAT is why we need more members to fill that gap which we all have.

These people shouldn't be on the road, they don't know how to drive! Get outta my way!



False. *I live in the suburbs of New York City. That enough should be a signal that we should adapt our driving skills. We can't help if we don't get there (this includes personal vehicles). According to the NFPA, 7,225 injuries of firefighters were caused by motor vehicle accidents! The same report showed that there were 20,300 accidents nationwide in 2022, and 925 of these were firefighters in their personal vehicles. Need I say more? The "average" weight of a firetruck can vary from 12 to 26 tons, even more! Many of us who are qualified drivers of our apparatus do not drive trucks often, unless that happens to fall into our profession. We go from driving our average Chevy SUV into a 20-ton firetruck in an instant. Many people say training is the issue here, but I disagree. Speaking for my Department alone, our driver qualifications are very strict, and we have to re-qualify yearly. So, why do these accidents happen? I am in no way an expert on this, but I can confidently say that speeding is one of them. Our modern firetrucks are built so well now that you feel very comfortable in that chauffeur's seat. Years back, you knew you were driving a truck! Now, our Seagrave Tower Ladder is more comfortable than my pick-up truck. Many accidents are unavoidable, there is no question about that. Where I live, we could be rolling lights and sirens and people pay us no attention. I was invited to ride along with a Department in Massachusetts, and was ABSOLUTY AMAZED that as soon as a civilian vehicle saw / heard us they immediately pulled to the right and let us pass. There are plenty of resources out there for chauffeur training that we should take advantage of. Again, I am no expert, but there are plenty out there. Bottom line – **drive safe and slow down!***

Somewhat a long read, but I hope you were able to get something out of it. I want to stop going to emergency worker funerals. There is so much that we can't control out there, so let's start concentrating on the things we can.

Stay safe.





**I AM NOT HERE FOR ME
I AM HERE FOR WE
AND WE ARE HERE FOR THEM**