

THE GOOD
DOCTRESS

Whether you're a star athlete or an exercise newbie, avid rider and sports medicine specialist **Cindy Lin** keeps you feeling in top form, say
SARA YAP &
LOW SHI PING



PAYING A VISIT to a physician for medical reasons is rarely a good thing, but if you're planning to start an exercise regime soon, doctor Cindy Lin is someone you would want to see voluntarily. The 34-year-old specialises in sports medicine, a relatively new field in Singapore that focuses on preventing, diagnosing and treating sports- or exercise-related injuries.

While there's a common misconception that sports medicine caters only to avid athletes with injuries, part of Lin's clientele also includes young children, senior citizens and people who simply want to get started on exercise. "I see pretty much anybody with a musculoskeletal injury — from kids as young as six, who are learning sports such as football and gymnastics, to the elderly who just want to keep active in their golden years," says Lin. "I also enjoy helping people, who aren't currently active, to get active. These include individuals who don't exercise regularly but want to, or individuals with medical problems who need help getting started on exercise safely."

A typical work day for her at the Changi Sports Medicine Centre sees her investigating the source of her patients' ailments, providing guidance on how they can protect themselves from sustaining injury in their activities and referring them to specialists, such as physiotherapists and dietitians, for relevant treatments. Part of her time is also dedicated to her involvement in non-profit initiative Exercise is Medicine Singapore (EIMS), which is spearheaded by her workplace. An ongoing campaign, it aims to promote physical activity as a standard part of disease prevention and treatment, as well as to increase the awareness of exercise among the general public. "We aim to help doctors feel comfortable prescribing exercise for common medical conditions such as diabetes or knee arthritis, not only to prescribe medications or injections," says Lin, who is EIMS's director of public outreach.

Some of the projects she has been occupied with include working with the National Parks Board to design fitness corners at the Simei

Park Connector. The outdoor fitness space — which contains various aerobic, flexibility and strengthening exercise equipment — was officially opened last year. The objective is to encourage the community to exercise, Lin shares, adding that many are "looking for that magic pill to lose weight or stay young and fit." But, she advises: "There's no quick-fix solution. The only true magic pill that does all of that and more is exercise."

Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Lin moved here in 2012 — when her husband was posted to Singapore — after completing her specialisations in sports medicine, and physical medicine and rehabilitation. Her interest in outdoor activities started young, with gymnastics, dance and horseback-riding filling up her after-school hours. "My parents basically had me try everything, but I wasn't really good at anything," she jokes. She eventually stuck with horseback-riding and competed on the Stanford University equestrian team, while pursuing her first degree in Human Biology and Healthcare Policy.

Unexpectedly, it was also this same sport that steered her towards her true calling as a doctor. During her college days, Lin had volunteered at a riding therapy programme run by the National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy in Woodside, California for children with disabilities. There, she served as a side-walker during the riding sessions to ensure the children's safety. "Seeing how this activity brought so much meaning and happiness to their lives inspired me to want to help others stay healthy, so they can enjoy what brings meaning to their lives," she says. Fuelled by this epiphany, Lin headed to Harvard, where she obtained her medical degree. She reminisces: "It was very intense working with some of the most dedicated doctors in the world — they genuinely want to [alleviate] human suffering. It was very inspirational to be able to train in that kind of environment."

For her medical specialty training, she returned to Stanford to focus on physical medicine and

rehabilitation, which helps patients reconstruct their lives after a severe accident. Among those she saw were war veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. "It's exciting because you figure out how to help them put their lives back together. It's about making a new beginning," she says. Not forgetting her passion for sports, she later attended the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, where she studied sports medicine. During those years, she volunteered at events where she enjoyed observing the camaraderie between competitors and their devotion to their sport — which is why only as a last resort will she tell patients to discontinue a sport, even if it causes injuries. "It's a death sentence for someone who loves doing it. Because we understand that is your passion, what we can do is figure out the source of the discomfort and how to get you better. We'll rarely tell you to give it up completely."

Outside of work, Lin unwinds by going horseback-riding and spending time with her husband and one-year-old daughter. She is looking forward to her next major project: This June's 28th Southeast Asian Games, where she and other sports medicine doctors will provide medical coverage to the athletes.

"As a sports and rehabilitation medicine doctor, I am able to help people in terms of their quality of life — be it through helping them recover from an injury, continue playing the sport that they love, or guiding them through a lifestyle change for the better. That is really gratifying," she shares. 

