

Miracle-Gro For The Brain

Exercise and Brain Function Link

May 9, 2008 Barbara Pytel

Psychiatrist John Ratey has discovered a link between brain function and the type of exercise we perform.

John Ratey states that the condition of our body is linked to our brain. *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* was published by Little, Brown in January, 2008. Ratey, a Harvard professor and expert in attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, states that our brains get flabby when our bodies get flabby.

Which Exercise?

While walking is a great thing to do for cardiovascular benefits, Ratey finds that aerobic exercise is an effective treatment for psychiatric disorders. Exercise also:

- Reduces hormonal effects in women
- Reduces addictive cravings
- Improves brain function
- Reduces the effect of stress

Exercising gives energy to the brain.

Studies

University of California at Irvine neuroscientist, Carl Cotman, made two discoveries in his studies.

- Exercise delays the onset of aging in the brain. (1990's)
- It increases the production of BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor) that helps build brain cell circuitry.

What About Dancing?

The complexity of the exercise does seem to matter. Martial arts and dancing are complex activities that stimulate the brain in a different manner. The more challenging the activity--the more the benefit. *Sweating to the Oldies* with Richard Simmons combines dancing and aerobics.

Does Intensity Matter?

Any motion is better than no motion. A slow walk for an hour is of some benefit. But, Ratey states that taking a shorter but more intense walk would be better than a long but slow walk.

Is There A Best Time?

Yes, there seems to be. Morning is recommended because the brain gets a great start to functioning on a higher level for the entire day. While exercising in the evening is better than none, morning seems to be preferred for the best effect.

What About ADHD?

Exercise reprograms the brain. Ratey states that exercise is a useful tool in the treatment of ADHD. After exercising, individuals with ADHD may:

- Fidget less
- Focus more

This raises the issue of ADHD children having to sit for hours during a school day. Many schools are increasing physical education time for all students. Cuts in the past for recess and P.E. are being reversed.

Aging and The Brain

Ratey recommends two major components to delay aging. He states that aging may be delayed 7-10 years if individuals do the following:

- Exercise
- Socialize with people

So the perfect combination would be to exercise with friends. If you have an elderly person in your life, pick him up on the way to the gym or take a brisk walk with him.

Other Brain Food

- Getting enough sleep impacts the brain.
- Playing an instrument also improves the ability to read and calculate math.
- Too much sugar intake also affects mental clarity

Again, in the end, we get back to diet and exercise to maintain good health.

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