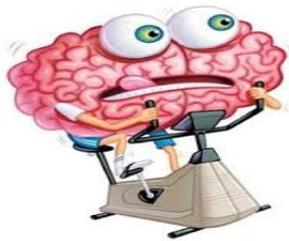


The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

With the smell of Fall in the air, brings the beginning of a new school year, and there are usually two distinct thoughts flowing throughout homes across our country. For the younger generations - a mild depression may have set in as the freewheeling days of summer vacation are traded in for earlier mornings, set schedules, and that "oh so dreaded" homework. Well parents across the country are breathing a sigh of relief as their lives begin a return to some form of normalcy. No more need to juggle to keep the kids entertained—schoolwork and extra-curricular activities will soon take care of that.

Extra-curricular activities that involve some form of physical activity are essential for school age children. It will strengthen their muscles and bones and ensure that their bodies are capable of doing normal kid stuff, like lifting a backpack, climbing the monkey bars, or riding their bikes. We all know the role that physical fitness plays in preventing obesity in children, but did you know that it can actually make them smarter. Allowing them to absorb information and get better grades. "Exercise builds better brains"

For some time, researchers have known that physical education and exercise changes the structure of the brain, resulting in improvements in, learning new information, concentration, fidgeting and even creates new brain cells. Exercise increases the flow of blood to the brain. The blood delivers oxygen and glucose, which the brain needs for heightened alertness and mental focus. Oxygen is brain food. Activities that involve balance and jumping, like jumping rope or karate strengthen the vestibular system that creates spatial awareness and mental alertness. This provides children with a framework for reading, writing and other academic skills.



According to many recent studies stress can damage children's brains. Exercise reduces stress by placing the brain into homeostasis and contributing to the balance of the body's chemistry, electrical and organ systems. Its effect is similar to taking anti-depressant medications in adults. In addition, kids that are physically fit sleep better and are able to handle physical and emotional challenges

from running to catch the school bus, carrying heavy books, to studying for a final exam.

Experts recommend at least an hour of exercise a day for children ages 6-18. Your kids can split up activity over the course of the day. A few minutes here and there. It all adds up. Have them get active after school before settling in for homework to help their focus. Then, let them take breaks. It's amazing how just a few minutes of physical movement can perk up your child.

The best kind of exercise for a kids brain is the kind that makes them breath hard, in turn getting heart's pumping and maybe even makes them break a sweat. It's called aerobic activity and you don't have to have a gym membership to do it. Kids can benefit from the result of being active even if they're not winning first place or trophies in every sport. The key is finding activities they enjoy. The options are endless, from roller blading, soccer, dance and bike riding to hockey and swimming. When kids find an activity that's fun, they'll do it more, improve at it, and therefore feel a sense of accomplishment

No matter what their fitness personalities, kids look to parents for guidance, support, and encouragement. It's important to set a good example. Make moving a priority and look for chances to be physically active as a family. The next time your child reaches for an ipad and a bag of cheeto's put down your blackberry and suggest a fun physical activity. Take a family walk after dinner. Have a pedometer race. Give each family member a pedometer to wear each day and see who can walk the most each month. Encourage your kids to use wheels. Not wheels of a car, but bikes, scooters, rollerblades or skateboards (make sure they have adequate protection - helmet, elbow pads etc). Encourage your children to dance. Dancing is one thing most kids enjoy more than any conventional exercise or sport.

It seems like a no-brainer to me, for kids brains to be healthy, they should be encouraged to participate in regular exercise and given the time and place to do so. We need to turn off the computers, TV's, cell phones and ipads and let kids do what they've always done naturally.

Here's to a safe and happy school year!

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