



Beverly H. Rohman



Exercise and ADD

We all need exercise to keep fit and healthy and meet the demands of every day life. The general health benefits of exercise are very well know --- improved cardiovascular health, stronger bones, muscle tone and reduced fat, higher functioning immune systems, weight loss, physical endurance, and even the possibility of lowering the risk for diabetes, stroke and high blood pressure.

While it seems obvious that exercise improves the body, Dr. John Ratey, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of ***A User's Guide to the Brain***, and co-author of ***Delivered from Distraction*** with Dr. Edward Hallowell, tells us that *“some of the most exciting new findings point to the positive effect exercise can have on mental health. First of all, it increases the amount of blood that gets to the brain. Thus, in addition to its well-known effect of increasing blood vessels and improving circulation in the heart, it seems that exercise or activity has a similar effect on the brain. The more we use it, the more we stress it, the better our circulation is, and the more fit that part of the brain becomes.”* With this increased blood flow to the brain there is an increase in oxygen that impacts the nutrients, hormones and neurotransmitters. As exercise increases the neurotransmitters, it has a direct and positive effect on mood regulation, depression, anxiety control, and aggression. And,,,,, most importantly for someone who has ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), exercise can help people to stay more focused, become more attentive and feel more comfortable in social situations.

It is no wonder that Dr. Ratey and Dr. Hallowell conclude that one of the most effective treatments for ADD is daily aerobic exercise. Dr. Ratey goes so far as to say that, in his experience, exercise may even rival medication in its effectiveness with some patients. Children and adults who have ADD should think of physical exercise as an important and critical part of their treatment program. It has been said that exercise is nature's form of Ritalin, one of the most common medications that are prescribed for ADD.

With all this good news about the positive effects of exercise on mental health, it is so important for people who struggle with ADD to get into a regular exercise routine. Although regular exercise may be difficult to maintain, it is more likely to happen if it is part of a daily routine--- something that fits into the normal pattern and rhythm of your life. Simple things like making a routine of taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking a distance from your office, or a store when shopping, then walking to and from your car each day. To make it more manageable and simple, “*choose an exercise program that requires little or no equipment to remember, maintain, store or purchase,*” says Kathleen Nadeau, PhD. Walking, running, stretching, yoga, swimming, and many other exercises qualify.

Exercise also helps to bring you back on track when you are having trouble concentrating, working long hours, or wondering aimlessly looking for something and becoming less and less focused. Take a quick exercise break -- stand up – do twenty-five jumping jacks, or run up and down the stairs a few times, or go for a brisk walk around the block. If space is limited, try taking deep breaths, stretching, or humming a tone to wake up the brain. These simple exercises are equivalent to pushing the reset button on your brain and help you get back into action.

The message is clear, simple and very powerful--- exercise is a very effective treatment for ADD, increased mental clarity and optimal brain function and to maintain good physical health. Regular exercise can help to better self esteem, manage depression and anxiety ---- it is good for you in every way.

When asked if it is absolutely necessary to exercise regularly, Dr. Hallowell commented, “Of course, you don’t have to bother exercising any part of your body or brain you don’t want to keep.” What is the value of exercise for your body and mind? PRICELESS!

*For more information about learning differences and ADD, contact
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