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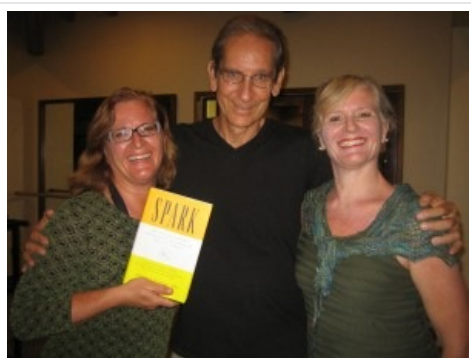
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## Spark Your Brain with Exercise

by [Fun And Fit](#) on SEPTEMBER 17, 2012 in [CARDIO EQUIPMENT](#), [CARDIO/ AEROBIC EXERCISE](#), [CYCLING](#), [EXERCISE, I WANT TO BE SMARTER, I WANT TO FEEL BETTER](#), [IMPROVING WORKOUT PROGRAM](#), [MIDLIFE ACTIVITY ADVICE](#), [RUNNING](#), [SENIOR ACTIVITY ADVICE](#), [WALKING](#)

*Kymerly Williams-Evans, MA*

### Get a sparkling life and brain via cardio workouts



We let go of him once he autographed my book.

Talk about good luck and great timing! Within minutes of arriving at [Rancho la Puerta Fitness Resort](#) we were seated for dinner next to none other than SUPERSTAAAAH, [Dr. John Ratey](#). If you read [Alexandra's post from August 2012](#), you'll know we drove 6 hours to the ranch specifically to hear Dr. Ratey speak in person. After all, he is THE expert on the connection between

movement and mental power. After reading his book, "[Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain](#)," I was eager to learn even more about how we can affect our cognitive skills via activity. (Plus I wanted my book autographed.) And who ends up getting seated inches from me but "John." EEEEEkkkk, groupie moment. Let's get smarter as we progress through life!

So what news about **boosting your brain through exercise** did we glean from our brush with an intellectual celebrity?

#### 1) Exercise is the Number One Youthener

(Ok, Dr. Ratey actually said "anti-aging," but we are not against aging. We are for **aging as actively** as possible, so I reworded the phrase. Literary license, people!). Dr. Ratey stressed this heavily in his book and presentation: **nothing compares to the effect of movement** when it comes to living life "younger" as **nothing makes our brain cells work harder than exercise**.



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## 2) Motivate yourself with the knowledge that Exercise Offers Immediate Results

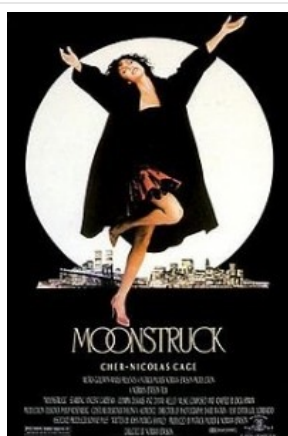
While we may not see results right away from our workouts, we reap MENTAL benefits **within moments**. The super important neurotransmitter is BDNF — Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor. **BDNF activates learning when we perform cardio**. As Dr. Ratey (aka, my BFF and dinner buddy “John”) says, “BDNF is a crucial biological **link between thought, emotions, and movement**. Our neurotransmitters offer ‘cerebellum training’ during and after each aerobic bout.” That clear-headed feeling we get from working out is literally a head full of enhanced brain power and activity. Dr. Ratey offered this “insta-result” fact as a **way to motivate ourselves to move more**.



Chasing down Dr. Ratey to sit with him again for dinner counts as cardio, right?



## 3) Challenge Yourself Every Day in Some Way



MoonSTRUCK or MoonSTUCK? Either way, Snap Out of Routines

**New experiences and challenges enhance our cognitive skills** (be smarter, stave off the odds of dementia, keep our memory strong, add brain matter and circuitry throughout life). Maybe we take a walk that goes left instead of right; or we change up our morning routine somehow. Perhaps we add intensity or complexity to an action we are already performing. Apparently the experiences we can create for ourselves to stay mentally strong do not have to be huge or entirely new. **Even small challenges rewire our brains for the better**. If you are in a workout rut, snap out of it (to quote Cher’s character in [Moonstruck](#)).

## 4) Find a Way to Inject Play into Exercise

All mammals play, so the more we can **bring joy and playfulness into our workouts**, the better off our brains will be. **At the very least, play**

**reduces stress**. Lower chronic stress levels are related to a healthier life and stronger brain. In

short, **make exercise fun**. Does this mantra from Fun and Fit sound familiar? If your current routine A) doesn’t exist; B) is not fun; C) is ho-hum routine, then **challenge yourself to try new activities until you find the ones you enjoy**. Like how you can combine tips 3 and 4 here?

Those were the highlights from Dr. Ratey’s talk. If you are keen to get even more keen, read *Spark*, ideally right after working out... at [Rancho la Puerta](#)! That would be a really smart move!



Did someone say “play with Raaaa - taaaaay?”



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### About Fun and Fit

We bring accessible, accurate, achievable advice to people seeking a healthier life through exercise. We have taught, written, edited, presented, spoken, mentored, and lived fitness for almost 30 years, and want to share our knowledge and love with you! Little steps turn into big paths. Move a little more than the day before.

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## 21 Responses to *Spark Your Brain with Exercise*



**Miz** September 17, 2012 at 11:38 am #

IM SO SO SO BANKING ON THIS ALL BEING TRUE 😊

Miz recently posted..[Role model Monday: It's how I do.](#) ❤️

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:06 pm #

So are we, Ms, Miz, so are we!

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[End of Summer Trip to Rancho la Puerta](#) ❤️

REPLY



**Heather @ Side of Sneakers** September 17, 2012 at 1:08 pm #

I love "youthener"- way better than anti-aging 😊

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:07 pm #

I have to admit, my sister is weird with words. Now I want a youthener in my morning smoothiee!

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[How Yoga Can Help Your Mind](#)

REPLY



**Cat @ Breakfast to Bed** September 17, 2012 at 1:21 pm #

is reading on the elliptical like a kegel for your frontal lobe?

I have issues.

You're well aware of that.

Cat @ Breakfast to Bed recently posted..[Peeing on Trees with Flying Cows](#).

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:06 pm #

Yes, as long as your forehead squeezes the heck out of the elliptical hand rails. Squeeze, release.

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[Back Stretches: Wrong and Right Way Tips](#)

REPLY



**Doug** September 17, 2012 at 2:57 pm #

There is also a ton of science showing that exercise is an effective treatment for mild/moderate depression. Personally, I have had a handful of clients who were able to get off their anti-depressants thanks to exercise...and my sunny personality

BTW, I love that line from Moonstruck

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0x-fkSYDtUY>

Doug recently posted..[Faith and Fitness](#)

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:05 pm #

Doug, as a person who took a Master's in counseling, I love reading that research too. And our mom knew that intuitively, as she would tell people to go for a run around the block whenever they were "down." Moderate depression is a bit murkier, but the evidence is really clear for mild depression. Thanks for sharing that info.

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[Tips to Look Super Cool and Totally Hot on Camera](#)

REPLY



**Tamara** September 17, 2012 at 5:31 pm #

One of the many reasons I will never give up teaching Step class! Not only do I have to think while I'm performing the moves, I have to CREATE them before hand, CUE them a few seconds before I do them and THINK about the next pattern before we even finish with the current one!

My brain is going to live FOREVER!

Tamara recently posted..[Is the paleo diet right for you? My experience with going grain and dairy-free](#) ❤️

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:08 pm #

You have it exactly right Tamara! All of those actions make you smarter. I can't wait to see your vampiric brain living forever. Wait, that means I'll have to live forever in order to observe your brain. Guess I'd better get to step class.

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[Finding Neutral Spine](#) ❤️

REPLY



**John Poole** September 17, 2012 at 7:33 pm #

But my life and brain already sparkle profusely from knowing Alexandra! 😊

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 17, 2012 at 7:43 pm #

That is because I sprinkle Alexandra fairy dust wherever I go. Don't confuse it with an early snow. Actually, I suspect that sparkle you feel is actually bits of your brain shorting out.

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[How to Be Enchanting? 5 Tips: Part 2](#) ❤️

REPLY



**Kristen** September 18, 2012 at 9:38 am #

If what Tamara says is true then I must be a genius! Oh but she forgot motivate. We also motivate as we create, cue and think. No wonder I'm exhausted. 😊

Kristen recently posted..[How Do You Know If You're Over training? Signs, Symptoms and Recovery Tips](#) ❤️

REPLY



**AlexandraFunFit** September 18, 2012 at 9:43 am #

Even I'm smart enough to know that Tamara is a genius. And obviously, so are you

or you wouldn't have thought to add motivation. Now I think I'll jog in place while eating breakfast!

AlexandraFunFit recently posted..[Want to Be Enchanting?: 4 Tips. Part 1](#) 

REPLY



**Kierston** September 19, 2012 at 3:29 am #

Lovin' this post! Great tips!

Kierston recently posted..[WIAW: Easy Bake Egg White Soufflé!](#) 

REPLY



**misszippy** September 19, 2012 at 4:59 am #

I really want to buy into this (well, I do) b/c losing the mental edge worries me as much as the physical edge. I think I need to work on that play aspect!

misszippy recently posted..[I've got my fall half picked out!](#) 

REPLY



**Jody - Fit at 54** September 19, 2012 at 5:24 am #

Turning 55 in a couple months so I am saying that I think this may be true but hoping it keeps that way as I keep again! 😊 Great post!

Jody – Fit at 54 recently posted..[Running Help – Saved Me!](#) 

REPLY



**Marcia** September 19, 2012 at 6:42 am #

So this is why I feel like I'm still 18 most days? Now if I could just get down in the American splits again....

REPLY



**Laura @ Mommy Run Fast** September 19, 2012 at 6:52 am #

Yes! I feel so much "sharper" all day long after I exercise. Love the tip about including play in your day!

Laura @ Mommy Run Fast recently posted..[Menu Planning Link Up Challenge](#) 

REPLY

[Christine @ Love, Life, Surf](#) September 19, 2012 at 2:17 pm #



These are great takeaways, especially the idea of incorporate play into exercise and every day life. I particularly like “youthener” too – genius.

Christine @ Love, Life, Surf recently posted..[It's Fitbloggin' time!](#)

REPLY



[Mariella Lombardi](#) September 19, 2012 at 10:23 pm #

Hi girls,

I do know that exercise keeps me feeling really good mentally and physically, and the best part is that it prevents premature aging. By the way, looking at that picture made me a little dizzy:)

Mariella Lombardi recently posted..[No-Nonsense Tips to Remove Toxic Thoughts from Your Mind. Always Feel Positive about Yourself...And Slim Your Waistline](#)

REPLY

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**commentluv**

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