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## Doc: Exercise is best self-medicine to ease ADD symptoms

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Shane Victorino played football, then soccer, then baseball, then ran track, growing up in Hawaii. It was just what he needed, to soften the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, even if he didn't know it at the time.

"Spend 4 hours exercising," said Dr. John Ratey, an associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, "4 hours in the gym, working out, and you are self-medicating."

Ratey has written a book called "Spark, the Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain." There's a chapter about ADHD and ADD, detailing how exercise, along with taking meds, will help increase attention and improve mood.

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Phillies centerfielder Shane Victorino talks about his attention deficit disorder...



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The book was partly inspired by a study that showed kids learn quicker and retain more if they do some vigorous exercise as part of the school day.

"We've got to get exercise back into the schools," Ratey said.

Exercise affects the dopamine levels in the brain, which is what the standard medications are designed to do. The average person on Ritalin or Adderall faces a tough challenge on weekends, when boredom sets in. Of the professional athletes diagnosed with adult ADD, baseball players have the hardest task.

"So much downtime," Ratey explained. "And relief pitchers have the hardest time of all. All that sitting around and sitting around and then suddenly, they need to get their attention level back, quickly."

He was surprised that there are 108 major league players with medical exemptions and thus able to use Ritalin or Adderall.

"I can see where some people might be suspicious," he said. "But there are studies that indicate in the general male population ADD might be as high as 15 percent.

"Back in the day, in many clubhouses, there was a bowl filled with greenies or bennies, uppers. Players would grab a handful. Baseball now bans amphetamines. A player looking for a lift might turn to Ritalin. It's like a double jolt of coffee, it's like caffeine in that way.

"College kids tend to abuse it, studying for exams, staying up late. It has drifted down to the high school level, too, and that's not good.

"For the professional athlete, once he's on medication, he has to stay with it. Stopping can affect his behavior and impact his family. An Olympic swimmer might get in trouble when he's no longer spending

4 hours a day in the pool."

There are lots of websites with reassuring advice for parents of kids with ADD. Rately is happy that Victorino has come forward to discuss his condition.

"People pay attention to athletes," he said. "He can make a big difference."

- Stan Hochman

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