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Friday, February 11, 2011

living

Why moving can make you smarter

Fitness Guru

By **CONNIE ARONSON**

Our bodies are meant to move, be pushed and stretched, and in doing so, you stimulate the growth of new brain cells, a process known as neurogenesis. Not only does learning create bushier, healthier, better connected neurons throughout your body, but running and walking, practicing yoga

or tai chi, elevates the neurotransmitters in the motor cortex and the prefrontal cortex, both



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close neighbors in the front of the brain.

Dr. Ratey, an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of "Spark," uses a nifty metaphor to get the point across on what running does: "(It's) like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin because, like the drugs, exercise elevates these neurotransmitters." When you exercise, at the cellular level the brain is drenched with serotonin, glutamate, norepinephrine, dopamine and growth hormones, all wielding a powerful influence, like Miracle-Gro for the brain, he writes. Mood, anxiety, attention, stress, aging and hormonal changes in women can all be positively affected. A staggering network of 100 billion neurons, each of which might have up to 100,000 inputs, all are stimulated to spur new growth.



New science suggests that everything about us is actually determined by the lives we lead, not the genes we were dealt with. Being smart and talented is no longer a genetic thing, as Michael Meaney, a professor at McGill University, explains. Our genes interact with their surroundings, getting turned off and on all the time. What if, instead of telling yourself you "should" work-out, you allow that Miracle-Gro to do its thing? After all, Einstein came up with the theory of relativity while riding his bike.

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Redefining gym

Naperville Central High School, in a suburb west of Chicago, has a truly inspiring physical education program that inspired Dr. Ratey to write his book. The 19,000 students are perhaps the not only the fittest in the U.S., but some of the smartest, all because "gym" was redefined.

In one class, only 3 percent of the sophomores were overweight, compared to the national average of 30 percent. In 1999, Naperville's eighth-graders finished an alarming sixth in math and first in the world in science in an

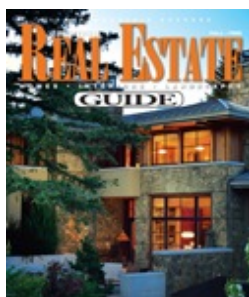
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international standards test called TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). China, Japan and Singapore up until then had always outpaced American kids in these crucial subjects. Naperville's kids don't have traditional gym, which Ratey writes is not about living in fear of not being picked for a team, or attempting a chin-up that they can't succeed at. Instead, these kids are running a mile before class, with heart-rate monitors, which are then downloaded to show their average heart rates during their mile. By the time they sit down for first class of the day, they are motivated, less fidgety and tense, and their focus and moods are better.

Sure, they are not all geniuses just because of the exercise, but their test scores are impressive, and they graduate with skills and knowledge to help them maintain their own fitness and health throughout their adult lives. Try it tomorrow morning, first thing—lace up. Who knows what you'll think of?

Connie Aronson is an American College of Sports Medicine Health and Fitness Specialist and IDEA Elite-level certified personal trainer. She is located at the YMCA in Ketchum.

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Blaise Pascal – Upper France

02/10/11 - 22:14

Our nature lies in motion. Complete rest is death.

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