



## SAFEPASSAGE NEWS

# SafePassage – Dr. John Ratey MD

by HOLLY HUNTER on Feb 28, 2013 • 2:23 am

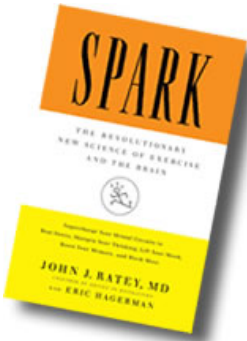
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A few weeks ago I attended the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs Annual Conference in Irvine, CA where keynote speaker [Dr. John J. Ratey](#), an Associate Clinical Professor at Harvard Medical School discussed his research linking exercise to brain power. During the keynote address Dr. Ratey also introduced his latest book: *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. The book discusses the reasons exercise is so important in our lives.

Ok, so you already know that a brisk 20 minute walk every couple of days helps you maintain a healthy heart. We've all heard it and some of us actually do it too.

However, did you know that exercise breaks every 2 hours throughout the course of your day actually stimulate your brain and improve your brain power? I didn't either, but it makes sense.



With the publication of his new book "[Spark](#)" Dr. Ratey is directly linking exercise to brain power and conjoining that philosophy with not only the work place, but the education of our children. Ratey is not a visionary, he is a researcher and his research with children and teens brings to the foreground a fresh new way of laying out education in the public and private schools. I suppose that makes him a revolutionary as he has turned the concept of traditional education on its ear. It's no wonder that Ratey is considered to be one of the foremost authorities when it comes to brain-fitness.

Ratey's research covers the gambit. Since exercise is a key component in brain function Ratey says that you shouldn't want to simply turn it on when its convenient. If you want to combat things like Alzheimer's and Autism you need to keep it on all the time. You have to think outside the box and find a way to exercise at least every 2 hours...and if possible, all day long.

That's right: exercise all day long. Dr. Ratey says that exercise turns on the frontal cortex, so why not have it on all day. This "exercise = brain power" philosophy can be kept turned-on throughout your whole day without ever leaving your desk by using a Fit-Desk. No, I'm not kidding. 650 of my closest friends and I saw the Fit-Desk at NATSAP. This combination recumbent bicycle with a desk top actually enables continual exercise for as long as you can pedal. Guess what the desk top is for? That's right, work. So you can exercise and work at the same time all the while exponentially increasing your brain capabilities.

Crazy, you say? Well it's so crazy that attendee [Angie Shockley, Q & A Associates](#), pulled out her smart phone, texted her staff back in WV and authorized the purchase of the Fit-Desk to have in the office by the time she returned from the Conference. I believe Angie actually bought three Fit-Desks while we were seated at the table.

Dr. Ratey's research indicates that continually exercising the body continues the production of brain-empowering hormones which affords you the opportunity to work better and smarter. Additionally, in a classroom setting it translates like this: a 63% Drop in Discipline Referrals in a Kansas City School and a 83% Drop in Discipline Problems in grades 4-6 in Charleston, SC. These schools have implemented the "Spark" research and have seen a dramatic change for the good in their students.

An Ontario school district segregates "Bad Boys" Ratey says. However, after their education plan was redesigned as an Active Program using "Spark" as a model they showed and almost immediate result with absenteeism cut in half. Yes, I know you have heard that exercise stimulates production of endorphins, dopamine and such which actually keeps the brain fog away, but as we age exercise tends to diminish and brain fog tends to increase. But

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Ratey cited a few examples of couch potatoes turning their lives around by exercising, but it was the photograph of [Mr. Fauja Singh](#), former 80 year old sloth, crossing the finish line at the Toronto Marathon last fall at the age of 100 that really sold me on the “Spark” concept.

The idea of continual exercise is one of the basis behind Wilderness Therapy and other outdoor education models for tweens, teens and those on the spectrum. You keep asking why so much hiking; what is really accomplished? Well now you have it. Turning on the frontal cortex so troubled teens can learn how to think, set goals and achieve them is the beginning of a journey filled with success for students who are otherwise directed.

Well there it is; now you have it. The rest is up to you.

**Tags:** brain power, Dr John Ratey, Fajua Singh, Fit-Desk, frontal cortex, NATSAP, Q & A Associates, Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain, troubled teen, tweens, wilderness therapy

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