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The Oxford Learning Difference

Exercise and Learning

Want better grades this school year? Don't just hit the books. According to research, for better grades and a bigger brain, students should be hitting the gym.

Here are just some of the current statistics on exercise and learning:

- A 4 year-old's physical activity can predict his/her activity level at age 17.
- 20 minutes of walking before a test can lead to improved student scores.
- PE classes in the morning can lead to as much as a 20% improvement in math scores.
- Student athletes have better performance on attention tasks than non-athletes.
- Fitter children have bigger hippocampi, which means improved memory.
- Fitter students scored almost 30% higher on standardized tests than other students.

The facts are clear: studies prove that fitter bodies mean fitter brains. And that means better thinking and learning, which means better grades.

Throw away the studies and statistics and it still makes sense: the more exercise the body gets, the more blood is pumped into the brain causing healthy cells to grow and neural connections to get stronger.

That doesn't mean that all students need to be captain of the football team to reap the academic benefits of exercise. It simply means students—of all ages, grades, and physical abilities—should, in some form, incorporate physical fitness into their daily or weekly routines.

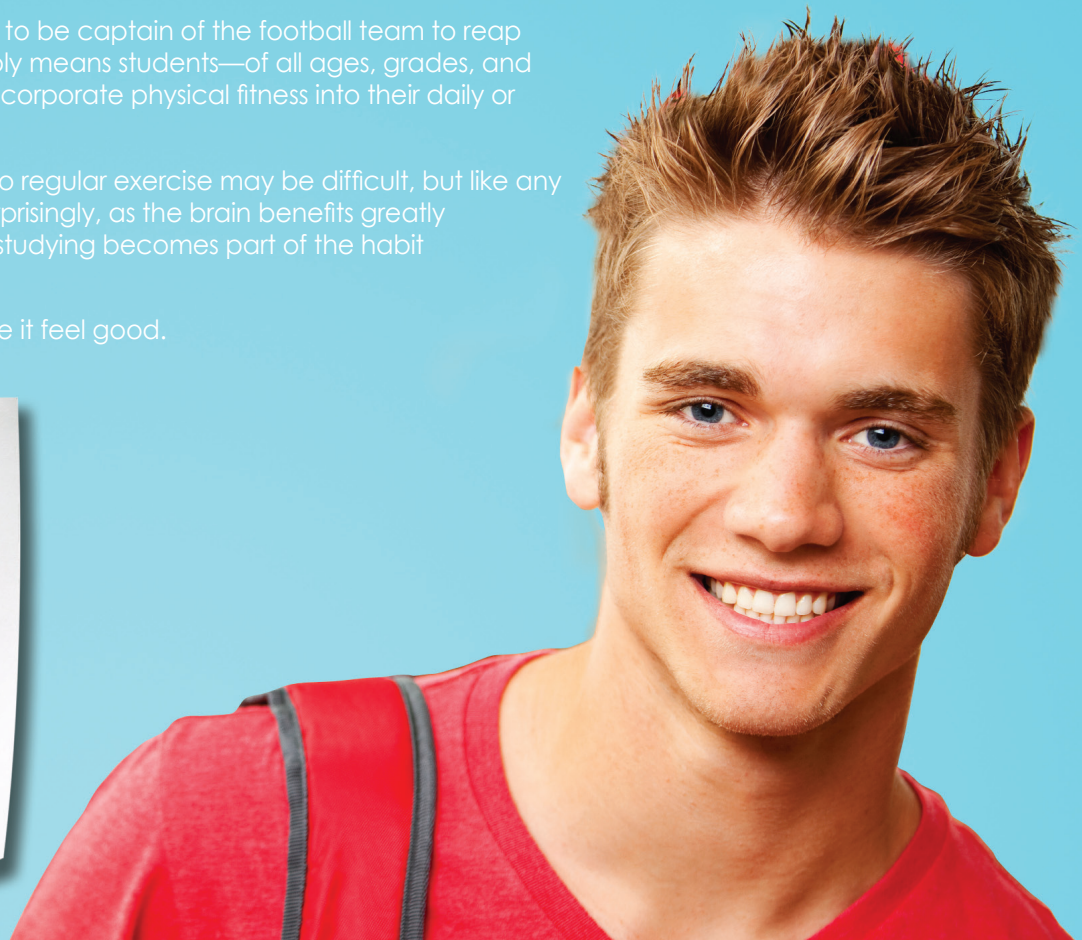
At first, the transition from no daily fitness to regular exercise may be difficult, but like any other habit, the brain adapts. And not surprisingly, as the brain benefits greatly from physical exercise, exercising before studying becomes part of the habit known as homework and studying.

After all, the brain likes activities that make it feel good. That includes exercise and learning.

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Log Off and Get Outside

What's the one thing standing between your child and physical fitness? Is it a video game controller? A computer? A TV screen?

Studies have shown that today's kids are online up to 7 hours a day! That doesn't leave a lot of time for physical fitness.

Because today's technology is increasingly mobile, it can, and does, go anywhere and everywhere that kids go. The breakfast table. The car. The park.

The mobility of media means that kids are constantly connected, which is how they are spending almost 1/2 of their waking day online. And they're not just plugged in—they're using multiple media simultaneously. That's problematic because too much online time can lead to troubles with attention and focus, interrupted sleep patterns, a sedentary lifestyle, and—as we've seen—poor grades.

While it can be difficult to cut back online time, it's important to establish Online Guidelines in your home that everyone can follow.

Here are some ideas:

1. Keep track of how many hours a day are spent online. What websites are visited the most? What takes up the most time?
2. Set time limits. Balance is key. Experts suggest no more than two hours online at a time.
3. Establish offline time. Set a rule in your house to have offline time where everyone puts away the gadgets and powers down. Studies show that being offline in the hours before bed can improve sleep.
4. Get some exercise. Find an activity that avoids all electronics and gets the blood pumping.

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discussions!

Tips At A Glance:

What are some of the benefits of exercise for students other than fitter, healthier bodies and improved self-esteem?

How about better grades?

Here are JUST SOME of the ways that physical fitness means better grades:

- Better test scores
- Improved attention
- Better cognitive functioning
- Improved memory
- Improved sleep
- Better focus
- Improved processing and decision making
- Better moods



Go To Sleep! Teens and Sleep

Teen sleep patterns can cause issues at home. Staying up late. Sleeping in. But what may surprise you is that there are biological reasons for these sleep habits that teens can't control.

As the day darkens, the hormone melatonin is produced in the brain. This hormone helps trigger sleepiness. Research shows that in teens, the production of melatonin doesn't usually begin until ONE OR TWO HOURS LATER than it does for younger students. This means teens want to stay up later.

Since teens stay up later than they should, waking up becomes difficult. A worrisome result of these sleep patterns is sleep deprivation. Teens rarely get the nine hours of sleep per night they need, so they head into the weekend sleep deprived. This may cause them to sleep until at least noon, which not only makes parents think they're lazy, it also tells the brain that nighttime lasts until noon and further throws off the sleeping cycle. This leads to all sorts of issues—moodiness, exhaustion, falling asleep in class, and ultimately, dropping grades.

Help your teen catch up on his or her ZZZZs by encouraging naps.

- **20 per cent of high school students fall asleep in class on a typical day.**
- **Teens need the recommended 9 hours of sleep.**
- **For teenagers, 15 extra minutes of sleep can mean the difference between an A and a B.**



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See our tips to improve sleep habits on the next page

It's Time to Lose Sleep Over Not Getting Enough Sleep

Being fit and healthy isn't just about getting enough exercise. It also means eating right and getting enough sleep. In fact, sleep—or lack of it—is proven to have a direct correlation to academic performance.

Studies show that:

- **Sleep-deprived students scored 7 points lower than well-rested students on standardized tests.**
- **One hour of sleep loss is equivalent to the loss of two years of cognitive growth during class time.**

Various studies on sleep deprivation in children show that even a short reduction in sleep time—as little as 15 minutes—can have detrimental impact on academic performance. Children's brains are in a growth stage until the age of 21, and the majority of that growth occurs while they sleep.

During the day, different brain areas absorb and temporarily hold newly acquired information. It's during sleep that the information is processed and relocated to permanent storage areas, and each stage of sleep plays a different role in the processing of information.

After a particularly grueling day of class—think mental exhaustion—kids need even more sleep so that the brain can properly process and store information.

One study found that every missed hour of weekend sleep creates a cumulative sleep debt.

To catch up on missed sleep, take short naps throughout the week.

Want to read more about sleep loss and learning? Check out [Snooze or Lose](#) by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman.

Want to read more about any of the stats we talked about? Check these links:

<http://tinyurl.com/2g3fsxe>
<http://tinyurl.com/aquqa32>
<http://tinyurl.com/4nvm4vy>

Move The Body For Better Studying

While getting a bit of exercise before hitting the books is recommended, when it comes time to settle in and study, don't hunker down at a desk for hours on end. Instead, get up and move around WHILE studying. Not only will the action help the body burn calories, the movement will help the brain improve its ability to remember.

Studying for a test is different than completing homework. While having set homework hours helps establish a routine, studying at different times, in various contexts has been shown to help improve recall. That's because the brain picks up different visual cues from the environment, so moving around while studying helps the material "stick" better.

If you've ever read over a list and stood up to pace around while reciting something, this will make sense. The movement helps you remember by activating various parts of the brain simultaneously.

So, when it's time to crack the book, don't just sit at a desk—try some of these ideas to help get the blood and the brain pumping! Don't just exercise before studying, exercise WHILE studying!

- Toss a ball while asking potential test questions.
- Skip rope while reciting vocabulary.
- Do lunges while recalling facts.
- Do jumping jacks while explaining something.

10 Tips To Improve Sleep Habits:

1. If possible, don't use any technology in the bedroom
2. Log off/out of ALL tech devices at least an hour before bedtime
3. Avoid eating or drinking in the hours before bed
4. Exercise during the day
5. Dim the lights
6. Close the blinds
7. Read a book
8. Skim over school work
9. Complete a chore
10. Write in a journal

Did You Know?

The brain is arguably the body's most important muscle. Like all muscles, it needs regular exercise. That's why summer learning is so important. The two-month break from school stops the brain's normal workout schedule and causes kids to forget important school facts and lose skills.

Get to know Oxford Learning this summer with any of our great summer programs: Math, Reading, French, SAT, ACT, SSAT, Catch Up & Get Ahead, and 20-Hour Group Programs. We have something for every student!

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