

Exercise is the single most powerful tool you have to optimize your brain function

Sparking Life is on a mission to transform America's sedentary lifestyle. To bring movement back into our lives – to improve our children's learning capacity, to reduce the negative effects of stress, to manage mental health issues such as ADD, anxiety, depression, and to maintain our cognitive abilities as we age.

We all know that exercise makes us feel better, but most of us have no idea why. We assume it's because we're burning off stress or reducing muscle tension or boosting endorphins, and we leave it at that. But the real reason we feel so good when we get our blood pumping is that it makes the brain function at its best.

In today's technology-driven plasma-screened-in world, it's easy to forget that we are born movers – animals, in fact – because we've engineered movement right out of our lives. As we adapted to an ever-changing environment over the past half million years, our thinking brain evolved from the need to hone motor skills. In order to survive over the long haul the hunter-gatherer ancestors had to use their smarts to find and store food. Relationship between food, physical activity, and learning is hardwired into the brain's circuitry. Sedentary character of modern life is a disruption of our nature, and it poses one of the biggest threats to our continued survival.

Our culture treats the mind and body as if they are separate entities. However what neuroscientists have discovered in the past five years alone paints a riveting picture of the biological relationship between the body, the brain, and the mind.

To keep our brains at peak performance, our bodies need to work hard. Science of exercise cues the building blocks of learning in the brain; affects mood, anxiety, and attention; guards against stress and reverses some of the effects of aging in the brain; and in women can help stave off the sometimes tumultuous effects of hormonal changes.

If you had half an hour of exercise this morning, you're in the right frame of mind to sit still and focus on the copy on this page, and your brain is far more equipped to remember it.