

## IMPROVING MOOD, CREATING A POSITIVE AND ENERGIZED OUTLOOK ON LIFE

By Dr. Anthony Tanona



## How kids can improve their physical, psychological and social well-being

Exercise. This word can have many meanings to parents and may conjure up all sorts of feelings. It does not, however, need to instill fear or anxiety. In most cases, when engaging in exercise, the opposite is true.

Research has shown that regular exercise can help to reduce stress, improve self-esteem, enhance school performance and attitude, ward off anxiety and feelings of depression, and improve sleep. So while becoming physically fit, you and your children are also improving your mental health and overall self-concept!

Research shows that brief 8-minute workouts may help decrease tension, sadness, and anger; as well as improving immunity in healthy people.

Short bursts of activity help individuals feel better, which means that one does not need to spend hours at the gym to garner mental health benefits. Many individuals exercise to enhance confidence and

reduce anxiety and stress, all of which contribute to psychological health and well-being.

Thus, exercise can be seen as a preventative or wellness activity that may help avert physical and emotional conditions.

Many studies have demonstrated that people who exercise regularly benefit from a positive boost in mood and lower rates of depression.

A recent Health and Nutrition survey found that people who are physically active are half as likely to be depressed.

When we exercise, the brain naturally releases chemicals called endorphins. These chemicals are the body's natural painkillers and trigger a positive feeling in the body. That feeling, sometimes known as a "runner's high," can lead to an improved mood, a positive and energizing outlook on life, and increased feelings of happiness.

Exercise has also been shown to amplify the neurotransmitter Serotonin in the brain, which is believed to play a role in maintaining a calm mood.

Exercise is especially important for children and research has demonstrated that it can have a significant impact on their physical, psychological, and academic functioning.

Fernando Pomeranec, M.D., a child, adolescent, and adult psychiatrist in Aventura, Florida states that, "exercise provides children important physiological and psychological benefits. By staying active, children get fit and have opportunities for positive reinforcement by creating relationships and experiencing success in both group and individual sports."

Through exercise, children can benefit from enhanced social skills such as teamwork, turn taking, sportsmanship, and developing friendships along with the ability to practice and enhance their fine

and gross motor skills.

Individually based activities, such as tennis, tae kwon do, or gymnastics can promote sportsmanship, inner strength, and dedication.

Team based sports such as basketball, volleyball, or baseball can enhance social skills, turn taking, and teamwork.

If a child is struggling in one area, such as in academics, successful participation in a sport can bolster feelings of confidence. This may be a way to increase your child's overall sense of self, which could lead to improved self-esteem in the classroom.

Physical activities are also a fun way for parents and children to spend valuable time together. Families can go for bike rides, walks, or play games which can foster communication, build relationships, and increase family bonding time.

Engaging in exercise can be especially beneficial for children with ADHD. Many experts agree that exercise can improve learning by enhancing the senses, attention, mood, and energy levels. A 2001 study conducted at the State University of New York, Buffalo demonstrated the positive benefits of exercise on children with ADHD. The study was completed with children diagnosed with ADHD between the ages of 5 and 12 who participated in

40 minutes of intense exercise five days per week.

Results indicated that the children who participated in the study demonstrated an improvement in behavior during the six week study. These changes were generally noticeable two to four weeks after initiating the exercise routine and children with oppositional-type behaviors demonstrated the largest improvement.

Because they were expending energy while exercising, they had less left over to act out behaviorally. John Ratey, M.D., in ADDitude Magazine, reported that, "exercise turns on the attention system, the so-called executive functions — sequencing, working memory, prioritizing, inhibiting, and sustaining attention."

Dr. Ratey noted that, "on a practical level, it causes kids to be less impulsive, which makes them more primed to learn."

Dr. Pomeranec cautions, though, that, "although exercise can confer benefits in the treatment of ADHD, it should not be considered a substitute for treatments."

When exercising, especially in the hot Florida sun, some precautions should be taken. Prior to beginning an exercise routine, or if something hurts more than routine sore muscles, you may want to consult with a medical doctor.

It is important to be aware of what your child's body is communicating to you. Exercising outside the scope of a child's capabilities, for too long, or without proper diet, hydration, and sunscreen can lead to discomfort or injury. By working out in a smart and safe manner you will increase your child's enjoyment and safety during the activity.

From structured to unstructured activities, physical exercise can have numerous physical, psychological, and social benefits for adults and children, especially for those with ADHD.

So go out and have fun with your child while getting psychologically and physically fit!

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## Ask the Specialist?

**Dear Parent Notebook: Last issue in the ADD/ADHD article, Dr. Tanona mentioned Anit-Social ADD. What is that exactly?**

A condition that can simultaneously occur with ADHD is Conduct Disorder, which can then develop into Antisocial Personality Disorder. Although there is not a direct link between ADHD and the development of Antisocial Personality Disorder, there is comorbidity between ADHD and oppositional-type behaviors (arguing, defiance, blaming others for difficulties, being angry or spiteful) and conduct-type behaviors (aggression to people or animals, destruction of property,

theft, serious violation of rules). Many children who are diagnosed with Conduct Disorder go on to develop antisocial personality disorder, which is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others. It can be characterized by a failure to conform to social rules and norms, irritability and aggressiveness, disregard for others, irresponsibility, or a lack of remorse. -- Dr. Tanona

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