

NEWSWEEK COVER: Health for Life -- Exercise and the Brain



In the March 26 issue of Newsweek: "Exercise and The Brain" Newsweek examines the latest research and science that shows exercise can make you smarter. In addition to making your brain run more efficiently, there are clues that it can also stave off the beginnings of Alzheimer's, ADHD and other cognitive disorders. Also: what's next for Attorney General Gonzales and Iraq's Dora Farms, four years after the first U.S. strike. (PRNewsFoto/NEWSWEEK)

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Growing Movement in Science Shows Exercise Can Make People Smarter; May Stave Off Beginnings of Alzheimer's, ADHD Exercise Decreases Anxiety, Improves Resilience to Stress

NEW YORK, March 18 /PRNewswire/ -- A recent and rapidly growing movement in science is showing that exercise can make people smarter, Newsweek reports in the current issue. Last week, in a landmark paper, researchers announced that they had coaxed the human brain into growing new nerve cells, a process that for decades had been thought impossible, simply by putting subjects on a three-month aerobic-workout regimen. Other scientists have found that vigorous exercise can cause older nerve cells to form dense, interconnected webs that make the brain run faster and more efficiently. And there are clues that physical activity can stave off the beginnings of Alzheimer's disease, ADHD and other cognitive disorders.

General Editor Mary Carmichael, with Harvard Medical School, examine the latest research and findings about how an active body is crucial for building a strong, active mind in the March 26 cover "Exercise and the Brain" (on newsstands Monday, March 19).

"People have been slow to grasp that exercise can really affect cognition," says University of Illinois neuroscientist Charles Hillman, "just as it affects muscles." Armed with brain-scanning tools and a sophisticated understanding of biochemistry, researchers are realizing that the mental effects of exercise are far more profound and complex than they once thought, Carmichael reports. Also in the cover package:

-- Researchers are learning more about how exercise affects mood: it decreases anxiety, improves sleep, improves resilience in the face of stress and raises self-esteem. All these benefits don't come because you notice what you've lost around your waist. Rather, they come from exercise-induced alterations inside your head, writes Michael Craig Miller, M.D., editor in chief of the Harvard Mental Health Letter.

-- If you are a couch potato, have couch-potato tendencies or just plain dislike working out, there are more opportunities to exercise than many people realize. Find the time with "exercise snacks" that last as little as 10 minutes at a time. Examples are pacing in your office while you're on the phone, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, trekking up the stairs at home during a TV commercial break. Or break up the day with two-minute walks -- to the mailbox, for example, or in a loop around your office corridor.

-- General Editor Anna Kuchment reports that while moderate exercise is good for you, vigorous exercise is even better. Specifically, it's more effective at lowering blood pressure, improving insulin sensitivity (which can reduce the risk of developing diabetes) and raising one's aerobic capacity. And one way to stick to a high-intensity routine is to participate in a

competitive sport. Joining a team forces you to do things that you might not otherwise do. Not only is it fun, but you have an obligation to show up for practices and events. There are teammates to work out with, and there's usually a coach on hand to keep track of your progress, help set new goals.

-- Reams of research suggest that exercise -- an activity as old as the human race -- substantially reduces the odds of ever getting breast cancer, lengthens survival and considerably enhances quality of life for women with the disease. Scientists don't completely understand why exercise is so important, but they're actively looking for answers.