

Exercise Your Brain

These simple exercises are based on the work presented by Carla Hannaford, Ph.D. . Carla Hannaford, Ph.D. is a neurophysiologist and educator with more than 28 years of teaching experience. In her best selling book "Smart Moves", Dr. Hannaford states that our bodies are very much a part of all our learning, and learning is not an isolated "brain" function. Many educators have found her work quite helpful in improving overall concentration in class. Here are a few activities that are suggested in the book. Although very simple, they are very effective.

Drink Water

Drinking water is very important before any stressful situation - tests! - as we tend to perspire under stress, and de-hydration can effect our concentration negatively. Sipping water throughout the day can improve learning and focus.

- **"Brain Buttons"**

This exercise helps improve blood flow to the brain to "switch on" the entire brain before a lesson begins. The increased blood flow helps improve concentration skills required for reading, writing, etc.

- Put one hand so that there is as wide a space as possible between the thumb and index finger.
- Place your index and thumb into the slight indentations below the collar bone on each side of the sternum. Press lightly in a pulsing manner.
- At the same time put the other hand over the navel area of the stomach. Gently press on these points for about 2 minutes.

- **"Cross Crawl"**

This exercise helps coordinate right and left brain by exercising the information flow between the two hemispheres. It is useful for spelling, writing, listening, reading and comprehension.

- Stand or sit. Put the right hand across the body to the left knee as you raise it, and then do the same thing for the left hand on the right knee just as if you were marching.
- Just do this either sitting or standing for about 2 minutes.

- **"Hook Ups"**

This works well for nerves before a test or special event such as making a speech. Any situation which will cause nervousness calls for a few "hook ups" to calm the mind and improve concentration.

- Stand or sit. Cross the right leg over the left at the ankles.
- Take your right wrist and cross it over the left wrist and link up the fingers so that the right wrist is on top.
- Bend the elbows out and gently turn the fingers in towards the body until they rest on the sternum (breast bone) in the center of the chest. Stay in this position.
- Keep the ankles crossed and the wrists crossed and then breathe evenly in this position for a few minutes. You will be noticeably calmer after that time.
- **"Lazy Eights"**
 - Draw an infinity symbol (a sideways eight) with the x at your midline.
 - Draw the eights with large fluid movements.
 - Lazy eights can be drawn in the air or on paper with a pencil or crayon.
 - Start at the middle and draw counterclockwise first, up, over, and around.
 - Then clockwise, up, over, around and back to the midpoint.
 - Make sure to start up the middle.
 - Do 5 or more with each hand and 5 or more with both hands together.
- **"Thinking Caps"**
 - Unroll your ears about 3 times on each side.
- **"Energy Yawn"**
 - Massage the muscles around the TMJ joint while yawning.

Why not take a few minutes first thing in the morning and after lunch to "fire up the brain?"

~J. Mulholland, Reading Specialist, Jefferson County Schools