

# Drive Your Mind With Your Body

Getting things done is easy when you feel like getting it done. But what about when you are lacking energy, focus and you just don't feel like it? Sometimes we can find ourselves not thinking very clearly, being anxious or generally feeling overwhelmed but our work demands that we perform. At times we want to be at our mental best at specific times, to complete scheduled tasks. For peak mental functioning in these circumstances, author Josh Davis, in his great book *Two Awesome Hours*, advocates leveraging the immediate effects of physical activity and food to improve our mental functioning.

Given that our mind and body are woven together, it follows that our physical state shapes our mental state too. Almost everyone has experienced, at some point, how our mind feels sharper when we feel physically great or pretty foggy when we are sick (or suffering from a food coma). Our body and minds are so intertwined that at times we confuse physical sensations with emotional ones. Am I really hungry or just tired or bored? Am I irritated with a student or colleague or simply struggling with the carbs I ate at lunch? Am I flagging with lack of sleep or too much exercise?

Research by Schachter and Singer shows that it can be very difficult to distinguish between a physical feeling and an emotional one. The two are tightly connected. Since that is the case, changing what your body feels like can be a way to help change your mental state.

## The first wealth is health.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

At times when we are particularly busy, one of the things we stop doing is exercising. We tell ourselves that we don't have enough time. However, looking after our physical health by exercising is important and can increase our effectiveness and renew our energy levels. In his autobiography Nelson Mandela reveals, *"I found that I worked better and thought more clearly when I was in good physical condition, and so training became one of the inflexible disciplines of my life."*

According to Davis, even a little exercise, at the right time, can help you think better, stay focused, sharpen your thoughts and reduce your anxiety, in the *hours* that follow physical activity. Research supports that exercising for ten to forty minutes has a consistent and immediate effect of improving executive functioning, particularly the executive functions that have to do with self-control. Exercising doesn't just make us more alert and ready to do everything faster, it may also enhance brain processing in making decisions, plans and finding solutions to problems. Perhaps we need to introduce walking team meetings?

Exercise is also fantastic for reducing anxiety. Positive emotions reliably increase after low or moderate exercise (such as a brisk walk), but surprisingly, not as much after more intense or longer sessions of exercise (eg jogging fast enough to raise a sweat). The positive effect on emotion peaks within thirty minutes of exercising.

One of the greatest benefits of exercise is that it helps our overall mental state immediately after we engage in it. Exercise also has the benefit of stabilizing our blood sugar levels. If you have ever gone too long without eating and had strange things happen to your mood, your clarity of thought and your ability to focus, you will know the impact of dropped blood sugar levels.

Even if exercise is not part of your routine (and obviously I would encourage that it should be), you can use exercise strategically, at specific times in order to boost your thinking abilities and your mental energy for when you need them most.

This week use your body to drive the right mental space to be at your best for what you need to do. Use exercise as a reset button before you need to take on that challenging task.

Source: Josh Davis, *Two Awesome Hours* and Inspired by Geoff McDonald

## Key points

Our mind and body are woven together

It can be difficult to distinguish between physical and emotional sensations

Even a little exercise, at the right time can help you think better and reduce anxiety

Often people stop exercising when they are busy, yet it is very beneficial

Use exercise strategically and leverage the immediate effects of physical activity

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