

HEALTH

Exercise provides respite from stressful day

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — A little exercise takes the edge off a stressful day.

But researchers say it may not be the exercise that reduces anxiety; it may be just that exercise gives you something to think about besides your problems.

"The reason people feel less anxious after exercise is because they get a timeout, or a break, from their usual cares and worries," said researcher Patrick J. O'Connor of the University of Georgia.

O'Connor was senior researcher for a project that tested the effect of low-intensity exercise

on women who were selected because tests showed they had high anxiety levels.

The 14 undergraduate psychology students were put on stationary bikes under four conditions:

- They simply sat on the bike for 40 minutes;
 - They sat on the bike and studied for a psychology test for 40 minutes;
 - They pedaled the bike while studying for 20 minutes and then studied without pedaling the bike for another 20;
 - They exercised without studying for 20 minutes, and then studied for another 20 minutes.
- The exercise level was equivalent to a

pleasant walk; this let the students keep their minds on their textbooks, O'Connor said. He and lead researcher Michael J. Breus wanted to see whether having to think about schoolwork kept anxiety levels from falling.

After each session on the bike, each woman answered questions about her anxiety levels.

Anxiety levels fell in only one of the four conditions — the session in which the women exercised without studying, the researchers reported in the American College of Sports Medicine journal, *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*.

Studying while exercising didn't have the

same anxiety-lowering ability. Nor did simply studying.

This indicates that exercise at low levels reduced anxiety only by taking the person's mind off what was making her anxious; when the students' minds were in their books, they had no change from their earlier anxiety test scores, O'Connor said.

"If, our study generalizes, you exercised while continuing to work, you wouldn't get the psychological benefits," O'Connor said.

He added that the exercise level was set low enough to avoid creating changes in levels of

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Planning, preparation key to managing asthma in school

Special to Sentinel-Voice

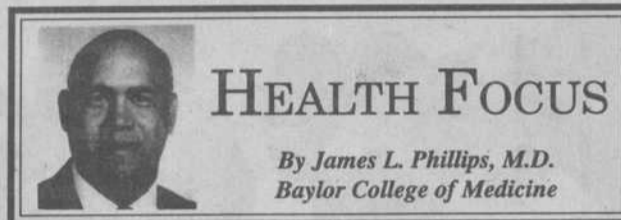
Returning to school means reuniting with friends and, for some students, returning to indoor conditions that can trigger asthma attacks.

Asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism, amounting to 10 million lost days per year.

Dr. Benjamin Interiano of the Baylor College of Medicine/Methodist Hospital Asthma Institute of Houston cautions parents that chalkboards, plants, dusty carpets, certain preservatives in school cafeteria food and chemicals used for art and science projects can often trigger an attack.

Asthma also can be triggered by viral infections, atmospheric conditions and emotional situations.

Even exercise can cause an asthma attack if preventive measures are not taken.



HEALTH FOCUS

By James L. Phillips, M.D.
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However, asthma need not keep children from participating in physical education or team sports as long as parents, teachers and coaches are aware of the child's physical limitations.

Take the following steps to make sure asthma doesn't impact your child's school experience.

- Discuss your child's medication with teachers and the school nurse. Make sure the nurse has medication instructions

from your physician.

- Provide the school with emergency numbers.
- Inform teachers of the asthma symptoms — wheezing, coughing, choking and shortness of breath.
- Arrange for medication to be available in the nurse's office.

— Ask teachers not to treat your child differently. Since children can be reluctant to take medications, stress to your child the importance of suppressing attacks and seeing the school nurse when necessary.

It's important, especially for children, to learn how to control asthma symptoms and to be a full participant in school and other areas of life.

With good planning and proper management, your child can avoid asthma-related school absences.

Structured environment can improve homework habits

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — A structured environment can turn homework woes into successes.

"If doing homework has been a problem in the past, use the new school year as a time to implement change," said Dr. Florence Eddins, a child psychiatrist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. "Work with your child to settle key homework issues of where,

when and the surroundings."

One homework essential is adequate study space with good lighting and few distractions.

"Desks in rooms can be fine if they aren't covered with clothes or other belongings," Eddins said. "However, the dining room or kitchen table often works well and makes parental supervision a little easier."

For young children, Eddins encourages parents to sit

nearby with work of their own.

However, parents should pull back as soon as possible, so the child can learn to work independently. Check in periodically on older children rather than hovering over them.

To establish a homework time, talk with your children about the time of day that works best for them.

"Many children prefer 'time off' for play or for an after-school snack, but others will

do best completing assignments before television time or other activities," she said.

Flexibility is another key ingredient to creating the right homework environment. Eddins cautions parents to remember that what works for them may not be right for the child.

"You may need uninterrupted quiet to get work done, but your child may like

music in the background," she said. "The important thing is to experiment and learn what works best for your child."

Homework success also depends on good communication between the parents and teacher. Parents should learn what the school expects of the child and of the parents.

If remembering homework has been a problem in the past, ask the teacher to send home

written notices of homework assignments. This system allows parents to monitor assignments and reward their child for completing assigned work.

"A minimal reward for remembering assignments four nights out of five puts the focus on the positive, not the negative," Eddins said. "Taking time to notice your child's efforts can make a big difference."

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