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# Optimal Exe

by Jeff Copper, PCC, PCAC, MBA

**T**here is a biological relationship between the body, brain, and mind. As Dr. John Ratey and Eric Hagerman pointed out in *Spark: How Exercise Will Improve the Performance of Your Brain*, exercise cues the building blocks of learning in the brain. Further, they wrote, “Darwin taught us that learning is the survival mechanism we use to adapt to constantly changing environments.”

Human beings were born to move. Among the experts, the consensus is that exercise is one of the single greatest things a person can do to improve physical and mental health. Exercise would be the drug of the century if it came in a pill. For people with ADHD, exercise can be even more important, especially if done in combination with a complex sport that requires the exercising of the executive functioning brain.

The problem with exercise is that it's a repetitive, boring, routine task—a classic characteristic around which those with ADHD struggle to engage their attention. In short, exercise is boring (see the February 2015 *Attention* article on boredom).

Poll the experts on an optimal exercise prescription and responses will vary. Typically, answers include frequency, duration, and intensity—something like aerobic exercise three times a week for sixty minutes at 60 percent of your

maximum heart rate. I'm confident there is some biological research that backs such expert answers, which makes them technically correct. However, as an ADHD and attention coach, I find in many instances such prescriptions become the obstacle to activation—they get in the way of actually doing the exercise. I'll illustrate with a personal example.

Many years ago, I swam competitively in college and made consolation finals at US nationals. In those days I'd swim up to fifteen or sixteen thousand meters a day. After college, I continued to work out and swam from time to time. For whatever reason, I believed a swim workout wasn't a workout unless I swam between three and four thousand meters. Until about a year ago, that prescription was the very obstacle that kept me from working out, mostly because I'm short on time and out of shape. It wasn't until I realized a workout of two thousand meters was better than three to four thousand because, in actuality, the longer



# Exercise & ADHD

workout was effectively zero because I wasn't swimming at all. Doing the shorter workout was better than none at all.

So what is the answer to how much exercise you should do? It's the amount that you will do. After all, most of us have engineered movement out of our lives. In my perspective as a coach, some workout is better than no workout even if it doesn't meet optimal prescriptions.

Another key point I've discovered in coaching adults with ADHD is that, since most exercise is just repetitive and boring, most adults with ADHD cannot sustain their focus on such a routine task. So what's a person to do? When it comes to commercial real estate, they say it is about location, location, location. When it comes to consistent sustained exercise for those with ADHD, it is about social, social, social.

For most of us, it is by far easier to exercise in the presence of others, either along with or in competition. More often than not, I've successfully coached individuals around getting exercise by focusing on the social aspects rather than the exercise. You've heard the saying: "I was at a boxing match and a hockey game broke out?" The same metaphor applies: "I was at a social event and I accidentally got some exercise." Again, my own personal experience echoes this. I am able to

swim my workout alone about once or twice a year. In contrast, with my swimming buddy, it is twice a week.

So, if you're asking yourself what exercise is best for you, just apply the same principle: the kind you like. Some exercise is better than none, especially if the prescription is not your cup of tea. A point worth noting is that exercise can be more than running, swimming, biking, or playing tennis. Years ago I coached an individual who chopped wood for daily exercise. He didn't have a fireplace but he actually sold the wood to others for pocket change. What a nice byproduct!

When it comes to ADHD and exercise, know this: Exercise is the single best natural treatment of the condition. For exactly that reason, I believe everyone should have a *psychoexerciseologist*!

The best exercise is the kind you will do. The best duration is the amount you will do. Just remember: When it comes to exercise, think social, social, social! 🗣️

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*A certified ADHD coach based in Tampa, Florida, **Jeff Copper, PCC, PCAC, MBA**, specializes in coaching adult individuals and entrepreneurs who have been diagnosed with ADHD later in life. He is the host of Attention Talk Radio and Attention Talk Video. Learn more at [digcoaching.com](http://digcoaching.com).*