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University Study Shows Attention Increased with Healthier Lifestyle

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Athletes outperform less active individuals in sustained attention

San Francisco, CA -- (SBWIRE) -- 04/15/2013 -- According to new information released from a study done by the University of Granada in Spain, a healthy body does indeed have a sound mind.

The new information confirms a common saying amongst many, that regular sporting activity helps better sustain attention span when compared to those with poor physical activity and general health. The benefits of physical fitness can also translate to a higher functioning capability of the autonomic nervous system, which promotes general brain function, according to the report.

The University of Granada put 28 young men through a series of tests to check fitness level and its relation to performance in brain-function aspects.

Half the participants had low physical fitness according to the American College of Sports Medicine, while the other half were either university athletes or members of the Andalusia Cycling Team's U-23 division.

There was an attention test that gauged sustained attention through the ability to respond to randomly timed interruptions of a basic monotonous task. There was also temporal tasks and time perception tasks.

Researchers measured the heart rate variability, which indicates the efficiency of the autonomic nervous system and how it alters heart rate in response to general physical demands. Participants used electrodes to measure HRV.

In the attention tasks, the physically fit group outperformed much better than those who were less physically active. In the two latter functions there seemed to be no difference.

The attention tasks affected heart rate variability in differing ways. Time perception reduced HRV more than other tasks. The sedentary participants showed a general decrease in HRV over time, which suggested low-fitness levels meant less ability to handle sustained cognitive stress.

The results also suggest that the cyclists' strong physical fitness "appeared to be associated with the processes implicated by sustained attention," said lead researcher Antonio Luque Casado in a statement.

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