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Playing sport improves your attention span

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Playing sport on a regular basis is associated with an improved attention span, new [research](#) (<http://canal.ugr.es/health-science-and-technology/item/64214-people-who-normally-practice-sport-have-a-better-attention-span-than-those-with-bad-physical-health>) has suggested. Published in the journal PLoS ONE, the study found a link between good physical health and a better functioning of both the autonomic nervous system and the central nervous system.

Investigators from the University of Granada worked with 28 young males and discovered those who normally practice sport benefit from high cognitive performance and have an improved sustained attention span - which means they are able to react more quickly to an external stimulus when conducting a monotonous task - as well as demonstrating more rapid reaction times.

Antonio Luque Casado from the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Granada, the principal author of the report, said: "The main benefit resulting from the good physical condition of the cyclists who participated in the study, appeared to be associated with the processes implicated by sustained attention."

Commenting on the issues raised by this study, [Chartered Psychologist \(/node/692\)](#) Dr Richard Cox says:

"There are at least two major reasons why 'playing sport can lead to a better attention span'. The first is physiological and refers to the oxygen carrying function of the blood. The brain requires oxygen, just as every muscle in the body requires oxygen, and will function more efficiently if it receives a regular and sufficient supply. The fitter the person the more oxygen his (or her) blood is able to supply his brain, resulting in an improved capacity for attending to relevant stimuli over a greater span of time.

"The other reason is 'motivation'. Sport is a competitive enterprise and those taking part want to succeed. Therefore, their attention will (or 'should' and this is one of the reasons they train so hard) span the duration of the competition and, as far as cycling is concerned, this could be several hours.

"The Tour de France, for example, involves the participants carefully monitoring their position in the race for up to four hours over a distance that is often in excess of 120 miles and their attention to what is happening is unlikely to drop by any noticeably amount for the simple reason they cannot afford it to. Otherwise, they lose their sense of where they are in the race and that means they are no longer working towards a pre-determined goal but merely taking part, or 'making up the numbers'; those who pay their wages would not be best pleased if they suspected one of their athletes was merely 'taking part'.

"Taken together then, I am not surprised by the findings of the study in question, particularly when the nature of the two groups is taken into consideration. That is to say, comparing a group of sport-minded individuals to a group 'with bad physical health', it would have been somewhat amazing if the researchers