Healthy lifestyle—what does that mean? In our minds, it implies a lifestyle that is well-balanced in areas such as nutrition, education, physical activity, and overall wellness of the mind and body. It is fitness in more than just the physical sense. A healthy lifestyle also includes academic fitness, social fitness, and ethical fitness—so much more than just a nicely toned body that is "all muscle."

Information abounds relative to the benefits of exercise, the harms of smoking, and the advantages of a nutritious diet. These basic messages are intended to try to influence people to make more healthy choices. Indeed, the benefits of physical activity are many. However, benefits are incurred only through participation in physical activity. In other words, to gain benefits such as lower blood pressure, reducing fat, or controlling weight, one must actually participate in some form of physical activity. Physical activity can range anywhere from walking more at work or at home, to gardening, aerobics or lifting weights. The bottom line is to be more active and to increase one's level of physical activity.

The 1996 Surgeon General's Report targeted physical activity and health (US Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 1996). According to that report, approximately 25% of adults reported no physical activity in their leisure time. Relatedly, participation in all types of physical activity was reported to decline dramatically as age or grade in school increased, and physical inactivity was more prevalent among women than men (DHHS, 1996). The problem with obesity and physical inactivity is not a problem exclusive to adults or those who live on the mainland. "It's not 'cool' to be fat, but that has not prevented an obesity epidemic from occurring among American youth" (Poussaint, 2001, p. 1). Data accrued from a locally conducted obesity study indicated that the majority of school-aged children in Hawai'i are overweight and at risk for being obese (Chai, Kaluhiokalani, Little, Hetzler, Zhang, Mikami & Ho, in review). Those statistics are incredible given the research evidence that lower mortality rates exist for those who are moderately active on a regular basis and maintain good health and nutrition practices.

Healthy People 2010 (National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS], 2000) listed indicators that will be used to measure the health of the nation. Physical activity is one of those indicators. The Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health and Healthy People 2010 are two national documents that call for a need to build a stronger foundation of health and physical activity for all people. Both documents promote the necessity of a balanced approach to health, nutrition, and physical activity.

Health, nutrition, and physical activity are as complementary as socks and shoes or a well-coordinated ensemble of clothing. Making healthy choices about what we eat and physical activity is an important practice that can lead to healthy habits. Modeling healthy behaviors and educating children while they are young and turning them on to being healthy and active is key. Healthy eating and physical activity help children to learn better. Physical activity may, in fact, contribute to improved academic achievement (Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody, Lewis, Marshall & Rosengard, 1999). According to Jensen (2000, 1998), movement and physical education contribute to enhanced brain function. This article will discuss the importance of a balanced foundational approach to nutrition and physical activity, physical education, and strategies to increase physical activity inside and outside of physical education.

Importance of Good Nutrition

"Supporting the health of the whole child is essential for optimal achievement" (Wolfe, Burkman, & Streng, 2001, p. 18). Healthy habits and choices contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Parental involvement is essential, as it is the most important key for children to have a healthy diet (Poussaint, 2001). Among the activities (eg, tutoring, talking with friends) that take place before school, one particular activity is among the simplest to do (i.e., for both parents and children)—something that can help to increase attention, decrease illness and help with learning (Wolfe etal., 2001). This activity is eating breakfast. In one study, nearly half of the children did not eat breakfast (Dixit, Houser & Sampson, 1999) before school. This news is surprising given findings that eating breakfast is an important way to start a child's day. Positive findings from studies conducted on the importance of breakfast included better performance on standardized tests, improved attention in late-morning task performance and fewer errors in problem solving activities (Tufts University School of Nutrition, 1995). Mom was right, and she is supported by research—breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

Although breakfast is an important start to the day, what is eaten is equally important. Meals that are high in starch and
sugar will provide sustenance for only a couple of hours, whereas a meal that includes protein and fat, in addition to the starch and sugar, will allow for longer periods of energy and concentration (Wolfe et al., 2001). Food provides the fuel with which the brain and body can grow and work. Many people consider it important to have a car that has fuel to get around; we also should consider it important for children to have fuel in their tanks to get around during their day. The Importance of Physical Activity

"People of all ages, both male and female, benefit from regular physical activity" (DHHS, 1996, p. 4). Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes (DHHS, 1996, 2001). When put together, these health problems are responsible for at least 300,000 preventable deaths each year (DHHS, 2001). Becoming physically active on a regular basis is the key, and the activity need not be strenuous in nature. Becoming moderately active on a regular basis is all that is necessary to reap benefits from physical activity.

Moderate amounts and levels of activity are needed to incur benefits. Adults can benefit from daily bouts of moderate levels of physical activity. Moderate amounts of intense activities (e.g., 30 minutes of brisk walking) or shorter bouts of more strenuous activity (e.g., 15-20 minutes of jogging) can be used to gain some of the benefits of physical activity (DHHS, 1996, 2001). Guidelines for adolescents suggest that they should be physically active daily, or nearly every day as a part of play, games, sports, work, physical education or other activities (Sallis & Patrick, 1994). Younger children should accumulate at least 30-60 minutes of age- and developmentally-appropriate physical activities on all or most days of the week (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1998).

Recess is an important and often forgotten opportunity for promoting physical activity. While it is a separate and distinct event from physical education, it is still an important part of a child’s educational experience (Burgeson, Wechsler, Brenner, Young & Spain, 2001; Council on Physical Education for Children [COPEC], 2001). Recess is discretionary time that can be filled with opportunities for children and youth to be physically active, which can help to facilitate improved attention and focused learning during class time (COPEC, 2001). While recess should not be a substitute for physical education, it also should not be viewed as a reward or as a means of punishment for work not being completed. Most but not all elementary schools (96.9%) nationwide provide regularly scheduled recess nearly five days a week (Burgeson, et al, 2001). For children and youth, this unstructured play time allows for a release of energy and stress, socialization with peers, as well as a time for practicing and using skills developed and learned in physical education. COPEC (2001b) sums it up best with this statement, “quality physical education along with daily recess are necessary components of the school curriculum that enable students to develop physical competence, health-related fitness, self responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity so that they can be physically active for a lifetime” (p.2).

Physical Education

Schools provide an ideal place to help improve and develop more healthy habits (DHHS, 2000). Werner, Timms, and Almond (1996) reported that panelists from a news briefing by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) noted that “schools are the most likely place to change physical activity patterns and that physical education curricula should provide movement experiences that are enjoyable, provide significant amounts of physical activity, and promote lifelong participation in physical activity” (p. 49). However, with increasing pressures for academic achievement and high test scores, levels of physical activity, particularly participation in physical education, has declined and continues to decline in the wake of the continued push for more time spent in the so-called “core” subjects. According to the Surgeon General’s report, 42% of high school students attended physical education classes daily in 1991 (DHHS 1996; 2000). That percentage declined to 29% in 1999 (DHHS, 1996; 2000). Illinois is the only state to require daily physical education K-12. However, the full effect of this stance has been mitigated by the fact that students may opt out of physical education in high school (DHHS 2000). Here in Hawai‘i, there is no such requirement other than one semester at the middle/intermediate school level and one year in high school. The most recent Hawai‘i Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) revealed that only 65% of middle school students and 42% of high school students were enrolled in physical education at the time of the survey. Only 9% of high school students were enrolled in daily physical education, compared to the U.S. average of 30% (Pateman, Saka & Lai, 2001).

Physical education is for all students and plays a critical role in the education (COPEC, 2001) and development of the whole student. It is through physical education that children and youth are provided opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to value and become physically active for a lifetime. Despite what your own physical education experience may have been and/or what you may have heard, athletes are not the outcome of our programs. In physical education, students not only develop their motor skills and knowledge of sports and fitness, they also learn about respecting each other, working together, fairness, doing their
Physical education is learning by doing. Moving to learn is another cornerstone of this field. The outcomes of physical education programs are individuals who have learned skills, are physically fit, participate in physical activity regularly, are knowledgeable about the benefits of physical activity, and value physical activity and the contributions it makes to a healthy lifestyle (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 1995). Put simply, the goal of physical education is a physically educated person. Consequently, NASPE (1995) developed seven physical education content standards. The standards have given physical education a guide that school administrators, classroom teachers, physical education teachers and students are able to follow to strengthen their physical education programs. There are seven content standards:

1. Demonstrate competency in many movement forms and proficiency in a few movement forms.
2. Apply movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills.
3. Exhibit a physically active lifestyle.
4. Achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.
5. Demonstrate responsible personal and social behavior in physical activity settings.
6. Demonstrate understanding and respect for differences among people in physical activity settings.
7. Understand that physical activity provides opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction (NASPE, 1995).

Physical education standards have clearly defined "what a child should know, be able to do and be like." Through the implementation of the standards, students can understand and become competent movers, which in turn can increase the likelihood of their being physically active. According to NASPE (1995), the expectation is that through adequate support and sustained efforts, students in every school should be able to reach these standards. Yet, despite the standards and the need for more physical activity by children and youth, physical education programs are often the first to be cut or reduced to allow more time for other academic areas.

Movement has been linked to learning more substantially through recent findings in brain research. The belief that physical activity negatively affects cognitive function is untrue (Sallis, et al., 1999). In fact, as a result of the outdated thinking that physical education is a frill, many students miss the neural benefit that movement can have on academics (Summerford, 2001). As reported by COPEC (2001), children learn through a variety of modalities (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile, and physical) and academic concepts that are taught across the three domains (i.e., cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) can have greater meaning for children. Furthermore, research findings also have suggested that exercise boosts the number of brain cells in the hippocampus, a part of the brain important to learning and memory (Summerford, 2001). Fluid needed by the brain to support movement and learning are glucose and oxygen (Blaydes, 2001). While glucose comes from food sources, oxygen intake can be enhanced through movement. According to Blaydes (2001), we exchange about 10% of our oxygen with each normal breath, thus leaving about 90% in our body and brain unchanged unless we breathe deeply or move around. Moderate to vigorous physical activity, like that which can be obtained in a physical education class and during recess, literally can give the brain an added boost of fresh air.

According to the most recent Shape of the Nation Report, improvements are being made relative to standards-based reforms in physical education. However, most states have not made much progress toward educating people on the physical dimension (NASPE, 2001). Unfortunately, with the significant pressure on school leaders to increase academic achievement per other subject area standards, efforts to stave off the rising epidemic of obesity may be placed on hold.

In Hawai‘i, approximately 24% of our 184 elementary schools have a person who has been designated to teach physical education. Of those 45 schools, only 14 of those elementary physical education Instructional Resource Augmentation (IRA) teachers have a professional background in physical education. This number is very low, considering the importance of movement in the early years of a child’s education. Many students’ first experiences with a structured physical education program do not occur until the middle or intermediate school level. All children should be provided with a strong movement foundation that helps them to develop skills at their own level and rate and also provides numerous opportunities to practice (Graham, 2001). Quality physical education programs from elementary school through high school can do that.

Strategies for Increasing Physical Activity

There are a number of ways that the physical activity levels of children and youth can be increased while in and out of
school. With much of a child’s or youth’s waking hours spent in school, what better place to help them get “turned on” to physical activity? As suggested by Corbin and Pangrazi (1998), many opportunities exist within daily physical education and in events outside of physical education (e.g., intramurals, walking clubs, family activity nights). Schools can do much to promote and encourage students, faculty, and staff to become more physically active.

To supplement physical education programs, other activities during recess and before or after school could be planned and implemented. The following ideas and suggestions are strategies to increase physical activity levels during the school day aside from physical education:

- Walking clubs and/or programs can be started where paths are set-up around the school. Students, faculty and staff can be encouraged to use the paths at various times during the day.
- Running clubs and/or programs can be started for those who enjoy running.
- Sports clubs (e.g., four square, basketball, volleyball, jump rope) also can be developed that allow students to use equipment to practice their skills in a particular sport they learned in PE or to teach others a new activity.
- Intramurals are a typical part of secondary school programs. Such programs also could be developed and implemented in an elementary school for the upper elementary grades, with alternative activities for the lower grades.
- Energizer stations can be set up during recess, before, or after school where students can participate in a variety of activities that promote skill development with short or long handled implements, moving to music, or other activities that children find exciting and challenging such as cup stacking.

These are all activities that have a direct relationship to physical education outside of the classroom, but what about incorporating more movement inside the classroom or at home?

In the classroom, the incorporation of movement can only help to enhance learning. With 85% of children being kinesthetic learners (Hannaford, 1995), it behooves us as educators to teach students in the ways they learn best. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning can easily be done in physical education, and it is done much of the time. Movement inside the classroom is often limited by structures within the classroom such as desks, chairs, and learning centers. However, these should not limit a teacher’s imagination relative to planning movement activities that may be done while seated or while on the way to the library or cafeteria.

Idea include:

- Counting activities that have a rhythm that could be tapped out by students stepping up and down from the walkway to the ground (e.g., multiplication tables—putting a physical movement to the rhythm of counting).
- Physically moving around the room to different learning centers using different speeds and locomotor skills (e.g., walking with large steps from desks to floor for circle time).
- The concepts of pathways and speed may be covered as a class walks from their classroom to the library as very rarely is a class a straight path from the library, cafeteria or field.
- Having students act out parts of a story can help with comprehension or putting a movement to letter sounds from a story—for example, a round shape for words starting with the letter ‘C’.
- Using one’s whole body to write his/her name in the air (e.g., ink is person’s hair).

Teachers who incorporate movement into their class on a daily basis help their students to activate their brains and stimulate the turnover of fresh oxygen to enhance learning. While physical activity will not make them smarter, it will help them to concentrate and focus on what is important for them to learn and, perhaps, to become smarter. Using physical movement may also help teachers to teach concepts like greater and fewer if groups of students are used to demonstrate that concept. For example, the class could be given a math problem that will divide them into unequal groups with one having less in the group than the other. Math manipulatives serve the same purpose of providing a visual way to show the concept. However, by using the students themselves, teachers not only provide a visual but also help increase blood flow to children’s brains through their movement, allowing for both sides of the brain to be stimulated due to the alternate swinging of their arms and legs as they walk or skip.

Conclusion

John F. Kennedy stated that, “Intelligence and skill can only function at the peak of their capacity when the body is healthy and strong.” The brain and body can only function in top form when both are healthy and maintained in a way where its functions are supported. A healthy lifestyle is a combination of many factors. Indeed, a clean environment, clean living conditions and support from others is helpful. However, in addition to those elements a healthy lifestyle can enable one to benefit and grow. Medical technology can now prolong life. However, what is the quality of that life if one’s body can no longer function in the way it was built? We can
prevent many of the diseases that diminish one's quality of life such as heart disease, diabetes, and even minimize several forms of cancer, by making healthy choices about what we put into and do with our bodies. Children are our future. Unhealthy children grow up into unhealthy adults. Let's teach them about healthy eating, living, and the joys of being active. Technology has made life easier and, in effect, also contributes to making us unhealthy because of all of the conveniences that have been developed. Schools are one place where students learn about the importance of a healthy mind and healthy body. Learning the core subjects is important. Yet, we must not forget the balance that must be kept between developing the mind and developing the body. Both are necessary parts of the whole and while neither should be sacrificed for the other, it turns out that one can actually help to enhance the functioning of the other. Movement does that, and quality physical education programs can do that.

Children go to school to be educated. Being educated means having the knowledge, understanding, and skills to make good choices—in this sense, healthy choices. Let's put more of an effort toward educating the whole child and taking a more balanced approach by putting academics and movement together into a more complete package. We already know that moderation is a good thing when it comes to healthy eating. Striking a balance between and being supportive of brain and body learning is essential not only for learning but for a healthy lifestyle. Learn about children's physical education programs and be as critical about them as you would enrichment or other school academic programs.

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