Why you should exercise both your body and your brain together.

We all know that exercise is good for our body, and we also know that we need to keep our brain active. Many people do these things separately by going to the gym, swimming, running, or cycling to exercise their bodies, and then playing so called "brain-training" games on computers or tablets.

There is of course an alternative way, and that is to learn a new physically active skill.

To learn a new skill such as riding a bicycle, we need the knowledge of what to do (Sit on the saddle, turn the pedals to make the bicycle go forward, constantly adjust the steering to ensure we do not fall off), but of course we also need the skill to be able to control the steering and keep our balance.

There are two parts to this, our conscious, and sub-conscious. The conscious part of our brain needs to be given the knowledge of what to do, whilst the sub-conscious needs time to acquire the skill. Think about it, first you need to know what to do and how to do it, and that can easily be explained to the conscious mind. However, the skills acquisition is a different matter, this cannot be rushed, and will come at its own pace, no matter how hard you try. In fact, you can overdo this part and you may find that shorter sessions spread out over a longer period of time are much better than longer intensive sessions.

This is because your brain can become overloaded with trying and basically "switch-off" from the task in hand. Sometimes after trying a new skill and overdoing the practice it can be found beneficial to actually refrain from any practice at all for several days, giving the brain time not just to rest, but to assimilate all the information you have been forcing in up to that point.

What are the benefits of learning new physically active skills? First you are getting your brain to work better by combing knowledge with skills acquisition, this utilises both the right and left hemispheres of the brain, making new neural connections, and actually through this process increases your IQ to make you more intelligent.

Scientists many years ago did a study where they took a number of people, (who couldn't juggle) gave them all an IQ test, and then taught half of the study group to juggle three balls. A period of time later, after allowing the jugglers time to practice and become more accomplished, they then gave the whole group another IQ test and found that the people who had learned to juggle actually scored higher than those who hadn't.

It is also a fact that practicing any skill that involves balance can show a marked improvement in the schoolwork of children with dyslexia. We are talking about skills such as balancing on a teeter board, learning to walk the tightrope, learning to ride a unicycle. Even Hula Hooping, requires balance adjustments as the body moves to keep the hoop rotating. **Please note:** This is not saying that these exercises cure dyslexia, only that a big improvement in reading, writing and comprehension can be seen in a fairly short period.

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Did you know that in Japan primary school children are encouraged to learn to ride the unicycle? This is because they appreciate the value of learning new physical skills and combining balance as part of that learning process.

An ideal skill to start with is Hula Hooping. This is because the basic skill can be easily taught in just a few minutes, whilst new moves and tricks can also then be quickly added to keep the whole experience interesting and exciting.

Of course, anything which helps children (and adults) gain confidence, exercise more, and increase their intelligence has to be a good thing, but the beauty of hooping is that it is an easier thing to teach, and learn, than many other skills.

Most children need to be nine years of age or above in order to learn to juggle three balls, and often even then they can give up too easily because they feel it is too difficult. This is a common problem with children, especially younger ones, if they cannot do something straight away then they can lose interest and just want to give up.

This can also apply to many adults who seem to think that just because, at the present time, they cannot do something, that it is probably going to be impossible to learn. On many occasions I have had adults who have said "*there is no point in me trying because I will not be able to do it*", obviously I then do my best to convince them to have a try, and the look of surprise on their faces when they realise they actually can do it makes it all worthwhile.

Hooping can be very easy to learn, as long as you have a hoop of the correct size, and are shown the correct technique, and this means it is not too difficult to keep the children's attention. It can even be made easier by giving the child a larger hoop. This is because larger hoops are easier and smaller hoops more difficult. Generally speaking a hoop cannot be too big, but can be too small (this is something that surprises many people).

Once a child can keep the hoop going around their stomach, something that can usually be achieved within a couple of minutes, we can then start to teach them simple tricks and moves not just on their body but also hands, arms, legs etc. This then makes the whole experience even more interesting for them, and leads on to them wanting to do even more.

In a single hour of hula hooping it is possible to teach children not just to hoop, but also to do as many as twenty-five different moves and tricks, and even introduce them to a hoop game or two that they can play together to encourage further social interaction.

All of this means that hooping is quite often much more fun than traditional exercise classes, and at the same time, by challenging and stretching their mental capacity, can improve the child's performance in other school work.

We have all heard the saying "You live and learn", once children discover that learning new skills can be fun, and achievable, that is a good time to introduce more skills related activities.

More details about Hooping in schools can be found here: **www.hooping4schools.org.uk**
For "How to Hoop" instructions for adults please watch this video: **www.hoopguy.info**