



## FUN WAYS TO PREVENT SUMMER LEARNING LOSS

"No more teachers, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks!" The chant can be heard from coast to coast on the last day of school. Students' hard work, blood, sweat, and tears have paid off in good grades, happy learners and parents, and that beloved break entitled SUMMER VACATION. Now it's time to dump the books until August, relax by the pool or at the beach, and vegetate....**NOT SO FAST!**

*Each fall, teachers report they often need to spend 4-6 weeks at the beginning of each school year re-teaching basic skills taught the prior year. Studies show that without practice, basic facts and procedural skills are most susceptible to being forgotten during long education breaks. Losses were noted in both math and reading, with **the math loss over the summer most pronounced**. So without any math practice during the summer, say goodbye to algebra problems you and your daughter agonized over most of the spring. So long to the basic math facts your son reviewed with flash cards. See ya later spelling words, spelling rules, and grammar lessons ...all quickly to be forgotten.*

**So, how to combat the summer season learning loss?** Children work hard throughout the school year, you say. They deserve the summer months without enrolling in summer school or making the kids sit for hours at the kitchen table doing workbooks. For those kids who struggle with school, it may be exactly what's needed to keep them on target with their peers. But for students who achieve great grades, hours reviewing each day aren't necessary to maintain over the break. Start by talking to your child's teacher. Find out if there are specific skills they struggled with this year or if there are specific skills needed for next year. Focus on these key areas over the summer. Even 15 minutes a day will help. Then make learning -- and using what they have learned -- fun. Incorporate the basics in your summer activities to keep their brain sharp, while having fun at the beach, on the athletic field or out of town.

### Keeping Your Brain Sharp Over Summer Vacation:

- 1. Exercise:** This is the single most important thing for healthy, sharp brains. A study of men in their 90's showed that walking more than 1/4 mile per day decreased the risk of Alzheimer's disease over those who walked less than 1/4 mile per day. Eric Jensen, author of "Enriching the Brain," is quick to point out that exercise is highly correlated with neurogenesis, the production of new brain cells. Neurogenesis directly relates to improved learning and memory. So get out there! Walk, hike, bike, swim, and play your way to a better memory (just don't forget the sunscreen).
- 2. Eat Right:** Take advantage of the surplus of fresh fruits and vegetables in the summer. According to the May 7, 2008 Vibrant Life article "Brain Foods" by Dr. Barbara Anan Kogan, vitamins and minerals contribute to brain energy, especially in the realm of mental function, performance, and thinking. Proteins allow neurotransmitters to improve mental performance. Studies show that the omega-3 fatty acids found in fresh fish, such as salmon, support brain growth and memory. It's not just healthy eating, it's brain food!
- 3. Read:** A favorite series, magazines, hobby books, or sports section of the newspaper.
- 4. Incorporate fun and learning together:**
  - Play board games.
  - Do Sudoku/puzzle books/crossword puzzles/mind benders while taking a road trip or sitting on the beach.
  - Use sidewalk chalk or shaving cream to write out math problems. Have your child make up their own problems for you to solve.
- 5. Museums, Zoos, Parks:** Enjoy, but include the educational stuff you might not have had time for during other times of the year.

## Fun Ways to Prevent Summer Learning Loss, Con't from p.1

**6. Incorporate math in daily life:**

- When cooking or baking, encourage kids to help read and measure the recipes. Ask your son/daughter to give you new measuring amounts if you double the recipe, or half it.
- Play games in the car as you drive long distances. Keep track of the number of cars v. trucks. Figure out the percentage of motorcycles you see as compared to total vehicles on the road. Compute the number of miles you can drive before the next gas fill-up.
- Use mental math to estimate the cost of your grocery cart contents. Try to forecast the family spending while at a favorite amusement park. What would be the increase if you added one friend? Five friends? Can your child estimate within ten dollars/five dollars/ fifty cents?
- Figure a favorite baseball player's stats using the sports page.
- Have your child convert the number of laps swam at swim team practice into number of miles if swimming the same amount each day over summer vacation.
- Convert the number of hours playing in the pool to number of calories burned. Let them eat a cool summery treat equal to the number of calories!

**7. Summer Workbooks:** Ah...the dreaded summer workbooks. They do have their place over the summer, but how do you keep kids wanting to do them? Set an age appropriate time/problem goal, and reward your child when they reach that goal. A first grader may have to do 5 problems a day. After 20 problems they get a trip to the snowball stand. A high school student may have to spend a 1/2 hour per day practicing Algebra. At the end of the month they get that cool t-shirt from the mall.

Harris Cooper, May 2003, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education Campaign, IL

G. Cooper & J Sweller, Effects of schema acquisition and rule automation on mathematical problem-solving transfer. JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY. 1987

## READING RECOMMENDATION:

### LOOK ME IN THE EYE - MY LIFE WITH ASPERGERS

BY: JOHN ELDER ROBISON

Whatever your summer plans, make sure to put John Elder Robison's "Look Me in the Eye" on this season's reading list. His narrative invites you into the Aspergian mind as he shows you his world -- and growing up in it -- through his eyes. Published in 2007, he's received much acclaim for his storytelling, as well as his story.

The Chicago Tribune writes: *"Autism and success are not mutually exclusive...Robison seems likable, honest and completely free of guile, qualities well served by writing that is lean, powerful in its descriptive accuracy, and engaging in its understated humor...It is also emotionally gripping...Robison is a great guide."*

In his book, he shares much of his frustration with school, and his decision to drop out before graduating high school. He describes his trials and tribulations when designing guitar special effects for KISS, becoming a toy engineer and starting up his own business repairing British cars. He also candidly illustrates the isolation he felt while growing up, knowing he wasn't "quite right" and labeled a misfit or social outcast. It wasn't until he turned 40 that a therapist correctly diagnosed him with Aspergers, changing his life and his perspective of his place in the world.

Daniel Tammet, author of "Born on a Blue Day: Inside the Extraordinary Mind of an Autistic Savant" states: *"John Robison's book is an immensely affecting account of a life lived according to his gifts rather than his limitations. His story provides ample evidence for my belief that individuals on the autistic spectrum are just as capable of rich and productive lives as anyone else."*

To learn more about John Elder Robison, visit his website: [www.johnrobison.com](http://www.johnrobison.com)

This book is recommended by a Confident Student client, grateful for gaining a better understanding of her son's perspective with Aspergers. Have you read a book you believe would be helpful to other families? Let us know.

## MED REMINDERS MADE SIMPLE

In today's fast paced, multi-tasking world, it is a challenge to remember one of the simplest yet critical things: taking daily medication. Fourteen and forty year olds alike have difficulty remembering dosages needed to be taken at specific times of the day. Yet many times, failing your medication schedule may have adverse affects on concentration, mood or ability to sleep.

Today's technology offers an additional tool which is proving to be quite helpful. According to the Associated Press May 12, 2008 story "Nagging via Text Messages to Help Teens Remember Meds" suggests cell phones are becoming a vital link for reminding kids to take their medications and a group of Cincinnati doctors are experimenting with the issue. Dr. Maria Britto, an asthma specialist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital notes that even when she's talking to adolescent patients during a clinic exam they'll keep texting on their cell phones: " 'You have to get in their face a little,' she says with a laugh. But it sparked the idea for a study to see if a daily medication reminder via text message would improve kids' asthma control – preventing full-blown attacks, improving school attendance and decreasing doctor and emergency-room visits....Pilot testing recently began, and with a full study set for later this year."

Cell phones have become one of the few things that tweeners, teenagers and adults alike keep close to them at all times and check regularly. It's a fairly inconspicuous way to remind a peer-conscious medicine-taker that it's time for their dose, if they haven't already taken it. Studies are revealing a drop off in medicine-taking maintenance during the adolescent years. Face-to-face reminders are often met with resistance, leaving many parents clueless how to help motivate their children to do what's best for them.

"Kids are thinking short-term and not long-term complications. If they're feeling better for the moment, there's a tendency to keep testing the limit," Dr Dennis Drotar of Cincinnati's Children's Hospital comments. His team is testing problem solving techniques, bringing in parents and teens to discuss barriers and brainstorming solutions without nagging or teen-parent head-butting.

Participants in the cell phone texting pilot determine the time for texting reminders to be sent, with messages spelled out simply without mimicking today's cell phone texting lingo. So far, the messages seem to be well-received. Adolescents in the study are responding positively, commenting that because they text a lot, it's easy to spot reminders. And so far some haven't missed a dose!

## BRAIN BYTE



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

**PEPPERMINT HELPS PEOPLE TAKE TESTS AND BETTER PERFORM TASKS THAT REQUIRE SUSTAINED CONCENTRATION. IT CAN EVEN IMPROVE YOUR MOOD!**

Peppermint seems like a simple sweet treat, but researchers have discovered it has some surprisingly powerful affects on the brain. According to a 1992 study by University of Cincinnati researchers, peppermint not only increases performance, but changes the electrical activity in the brain, signifying increased attention. Professor Joel Warm explains: "The sensory nerves picking up odor also go to areas of the brain that control memory and emotion. That is perhaps why peppermint is useful." A 2005 Wheeling Jesuit University study focused more on this emotional component, revealing that the smell of peppermint can enhance a calmer mood while making your typical morning commute to work, cutting down your frustration level and making you more alert while behind the wheel.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

**Towson University Center**

**Monday, June 9, 7 – 9 pm**

Guest Speakers: Dr. Peter Gerhardt, President Organization for Autism Research and Ari Ne'eman, President, The Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

For more information: Lisa Crabtree, 410.704.4330, [lcrabtree@towson.edu](mailto:lcrabtree@towson.edu)

### **Pathfinders for Autism Picnic and Sailing**

**Saturday, June 14th, 2:00 to 5:00 PM**

Join Pathfinders for Autism and Chesapeake Regional Accessible Boating (CRAB) at Sandy Point State Park in Anne Arundel County for summer fun and sailing.

Bring your family out to enjoy a day of picnicing, swimming, fishing (anyone over 16 needs a Maryland Bay Sport Fishing License ), hiking or the playground - and to meet other families. Pathfinders staff and volunteers will be on hand with fun "camp" inspired games and prizes. A limited number of guests will also enjoy the opportunity to sail FREE, courtesy of CRAB.

ALL Park Fees Apply - \$5 pp (\$6 pp out of state). Bring your own food & refreshments, concessions are available.

You MUST register to participate in the sailing trip. Space is very limited. Individuals with autism will be given seating priority.

For more information and to register, contact Glenn Carr at 410-269-1237 or [glennccarr@aol.com](mailto:glennccarr@aol.com).

## INSPIRATION CORNER

Self esteem isn't everything; it's just that there's nothing without it.

-GLORIA STEINEM -

## **MARYLAND YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM**

Rising high school juniors and seniors with disabilities are eligible to apply for this unique career and leadership residential program being held **July 29 – August 1 at Bowie State University**. Attending students build leadership skills and gain valuable career information and guidance. Participants work in small groups and will hear guest speakers address a range of helpful topics from disability rights and self advocacy to careers and technology.

For more information, contact Cathy Raggio 301.277.2839 or visit: [www.md-council.org/resources/ylf.html](http://www.md-council.org/resources/ylf.html)

