

# Healthy Learning: Brain Breaks

Healthy students are more successful students! Academic performance, attendance and classroom behaviors can all be improved through the implementation of strategies which encourage good nutrition and increased physical activity<sup>1</sup>.

## How Can Physical Activity Improve Academic Achievement?

- Better test performance <sup>1</sup>
- Improved organization of thoughts and decision making abilities <sup>2</sup>
- Increased concentration and attention <sup>3</sup>
- Less inattention and moodiness <sup>4</sup>

## What are Brain Breaks?

Brain Breaks are a quick and effective way of changing or focusing one's physical and mental state. These 1-5 minute physical activities can help students activate, energize and stimulate their brains when they've temporarily "checked out" from learning.

*Tips for implementing brain breaks successfully:*

1. Set behavior expectations.
2. Set a timer for the activity so it doesn't exceed set time limits.
3. Explain the procedure and tasks clearly so all may participate.
4. Use a cool down or count down technique for getting students to resume work immediately.



## Brain Break Ideas

### ***Whole Body Rock, Paper, Scissors***

Pairs of students face each other and use the following movements for each element:

Rock- feet together, arms down at sides

Paper- feet apart, arms straight out from shoulders

Scissors- right foot out, left foot back, hands on hips

Students jump in place three times while saying "Rock, Paper, Scissors, Go!" On "Go!", students change to one of the element positions. Rock breaks scissors (rock wins), Scissors cut paper (scissors win), Paper covers rock (paper wins). Students play best of five rounds.



**As If**

Students act out the following “as if” situations. Perform each activity for 20 seconds. Encourage students to write their ideas on index cards for later use.

- Climb as if you are on a mountain of your favorite ice cream.
- Jump as if you were popcorn popping.
- Stomp your feet as if you were mashing potatoes.
- Swim as if you were a fish being chased by a shark.
- Wiggle and twist as if you were a smoothie in a blender.
- Tip toe quietly as if the room was filled with sleeping babies.

**Snap Wink**

Students stand up. Wink your left eye and snap your right middle finger and thumb together at the same time. Wink your right eye and snap your left middle finger and thumb together at the same time. Repeat. Try to do this as quickly as you can. *\*This is a great way to engage both sides of the brain!*

**Spelling Practice**

Assign a move (jump, twist, stomp, etc.). As students spell the word out loud, they perform the move for each letter.

**Math Practice**

Assign a movement (jumping jacks, etc.) and write an operation on the board (addition, subtraction, etc.). Give each student one playing card (ace to 10 only). They will use the numbers to solve the equation, then perform the moves. Ex.  $6-4=2$  jumping jacks. Repeat with a different partner.

**Attention Please**

Use a designated phrase or signal to help students settle down and finish the activity. Explain the signal beforehand.

Here’s a few to try:

- “Frozen Fruitcicles”- When you say “freeze”, everyone stops and holds the position they’re in.
- Say “We’re stopping in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.” Ask the students to join the countdown when they hear you.
- Use a silly call and response.  
You: “Okey dokey” Them: “Artichokey”  
You: “Easy peasy” Them: “Lemon Squeezy”  
You: “Winner Winner” Them: “Chicken Dinner”

**Calm down**

After the brain break activity, settle students by asking them to do a standing pretzel. Cross left ankle over right. Extend arms and cross left wrist over right. Bring palms together and interlace fingers. Now bring hands up toward chin. Stand quietly for 30 seconds with eyes closed and tongue on the roof of mouth.

**More Resources**

Visit our OSU Healthy Learning site to find links to additional brain break resources!

<http://go.osu.edu/healthylearning>

**References**

1. Donnelly JE, Lambourne K. Classroom-based Physical Activity, Cognition, and Academic Achievement; *Prev Med* 2011; 52 Suppl 1:S36.
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3. *Monogr Soc Res Child Dev.* 2014 Dec;79(4). doi: 10.1111/mono.12127
4. Betsy Hoza et al., “A Randomized Trial Examining the Effects of Aerobic Physical Activity on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms in Young Children.” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 655-67. doi:10.1007/s10802-014-9929-y.

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