

# 'Brain Breaks' increase activity, educational performance in elementary schools

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A recent Oregon survey about an exercise DVD that adds short breaks of physical activity into the daily routine of elementary school students found it had a high level of popularity with both students and teachers, and offered clear advantages for overly sedentary educational programs.

Called "Brain Breaks," the DVD was developed and produced by the Healthy Youth Program of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, and is available nationally.

Brain Breaks leads children in 5-7 minute segments of [physical activity](#), demonstrated by OSU students and elementary school children from Corvallis, Oregon. The short periods of [exercise](#) aim to improve the physical health, mental awareness and educational success of children.

"We're increasingly recognizing the importance of physical activity for children even as the academic demands placed on them are cutting into the traditional programs of recess and physical education," said Gerd Bobe, an assistant professor in the OSU College of Agricultural Sciences, an expert in public health nutrition and behavior, and principal investigator with the Linus Pauling Institute.

"Kids need to move, they can't just sit all day long," Bobe said. "Given the time constraints and multiple demands that schools are facing, we really believe the concept of short activity breaks, right in the classroom, is the way to go."

Oregon law, for instance, mandates that by 2017 elementary schools will be required to have 30 minutes a day of physical education classes, in addition to recess periods. But a survey conducted by the Healthy Youth Program found that 92 percent of Oregon public [elementary schools](#) currently do not meet this standard. And sometimes, Bobe said, elimination of recess is used as a disciplinary tool, potentially taking activity away from those students who may need it the most.

Brain Breaks was created to bring more activity back into classrooms, especially when it may be most useful – in the afternoon after lunch, for instance, when attention spans and concentration tend to waver. Research has shown that physical activity can increase academic performance, student focus and classroom behavior, Bobe said.

The program offers a variety of segments, including six based on stretching and relaxation, five on endurance, and one on strength, with imaginative concepts such as "space adventures" and "crazy kangaroos." No equipment is needed, other than a chair for the strength segment, and all activities can be done in a classroom setting. An abstract of the work has been published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

A recent survey of the Healthy Youth Program that was sent to participating Oregon school districts found that:

- Almost all teachers said the program was appropriate for their classes and well-understood by the class;
- More than 90 percent of teachers said the exercise segments had the right length, and that students were more focused after using the program;
- All of the segments were popular with more than 80 percent of students, but the stretching and relaxation activities had the highest approval, at 95 percent, and were also most frequently used by teachers;

- About three-fourths of the teachers were using the program two to three times per week, and more than 90 percent plan to continue its use.

"Longer periods of exercise have a place, but research shows that these short programs can be very valuable as well," Bobe said. "They can increase oxygen consumption, range of motion, endurance, and get kids in the habit of being more active. A little bit of exercise can go a long way."

A second edition of the DVD is being developed, Bobe said. More information on the DVD is available online at [lpi.oregonstate.edu/healthyyou...ia/brainbreaks.shtml](http://lpi.oregonstate.edu/healthyyou...ia/brainbreaks.shtml) , including a video trailer and how to buy a copy.

"This survey shows a program that's working and is valuable," Bobe said. "We hope it becomes popular across the nation."

Provided by Oregon State University

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