

Mind games

Playing smart takes on new meaning as sports are shown to aid a child's mental growth **BY TERENCE LEE**

IF YOUR boy is out playing football instead of doing his homework, don't panic just yet. The exercise he's getting may actually help his grades.

While we often laud exercise for its benefits to physiological development, we forget that it can also help a child grow mentally.

"And it's not just high-intensity sports, such as basketball or rugby, that are beneficial," said Mr Edgar Tham, consultant sports psychologist at the Singapore Sports School. "Lighter activities such as brisk walking, cycling or roller-blading can benefit children — and adults — too."



Studies have shown that exercise can help reduce fatigue and increase vigour throughout the day. Children who exercise will also feel more alert, a useful trait to have when school is in session.

In addition, lessons learnt on the pitch can help children through their teenage and adult years. Team sports, for example, provide additional benefits as they "give children more opportunities to develop their communication skills, leadership qualities and team player attitudes", said Mr Tham. He added that exercise, in general, can boost a child's academic performance, self-confidence, memory and body image. The catch is: Exercise must be done on a regular basis.

A review conducted by the United States

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Edgar Tham

Center for Disease Control and Prevention, of more than 800 published papers that examined how exercise can help children, found that children should get about an hour of moderate to vigorous exercise each day.

Mr Tham recommends getting children to start exercising from a young age, as it is at that stage that they are likely to start developing a lifelong interest in sports and maintaining an active lifestyle. "Good lifestyle habits must begin at a young age. Exercise is not a choice any more, it's a must!"