



## Going to School for **Your Health**

**By Vicki Salemi**

Provided by *ClassesUSA.com*

When your mother would nag you about your homework, tests, and papers, she'd sometimes add, "I'm not saying this for my health, you know."

Turns out she was right -- she was saying it for *your* health.

According to the 2007 edition of the College Board's "Education Pays" report, the more educated you are, the healthier you are. In 2005, 61 percent of four-year college graduates ages 25-34 exercised vigorously at least once a week. Only 31 percent of high school graduates did so.

In fact, at every age, individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in leisure-time exercise than those with lower levels of education. Numerous studies investigating the relationship between education and health support the idea that the skills, attitudes, and patterns of thought fostered by education lead to more responsible health-related behaviors. For a wellness-seeking society, this is a correlation worth paying attention to.

### **Lessons in discipline 101**

Alvaro Fernandez, CEO and founder of Sharp Brains, a company devoted to brain fitness, says wellness is instilled by the virtue of higher education itself. "Learning how to cope with the unstructured college experience is good training ground for life. Students learn how to make decisions under pressure, choose among many different options, plan for the long term, and search for the right information in the right places and process it accurately."

Working toward a degree becomes more than just earning a high grade point average or securing a job after graduation. "A critical benefit for graduates is the mental training and healthy behavior habits that will help them stay on top of their game for many years," says Fernandez. Making appropriate health decisions is no easy task given the limited time doctors have for patients and the overwhelming amount of information available. "College provides a great training ground for developing these skills and a supportive environment to make them daily habits," adds Fernandez.

### **Benefits beyond the paycheck**

By maintaining healthy behaviors developed in college -- such as exercising regularly -- people ultimately gain a long-term career advantage, says **Dr. Georgianna Donadio**, founder and director of the **National Institute of Whole Health**, an organization dedicated to educating individuals about all aspects of health. "Maintaining your health is part of your emotional and physical well-being for sustained employment," Donadio says. "Your health is a precious investment. It's a competitive world; if you're not healthy to stay the course, you'll get replaced very easily."

Plus, a college education opens doors to career opportunities that can provide excellent health benefits through employers. In essence, setting yourself up for a good career through education may yield better and more health care options, says Donadio. "This is a critical component to maintaining your health and affording preventative medicine to keep you healthy and productive, not only on the job, but for a higher quality of life and greater longevity as well."

Natalia Maldonado, a University of Miami alumna, invested in her own wellness by incorporating her undergraduate exercise habits into daily routines when she graduated two years ago. "College definitely helped me establish an effective workout routine, mostly because of the easy access it provided to a great gym," Maldonado says. For instance, membership to the campus wellness center was included in the tuition activity fee. "They had great machines and huge [fitness] classes that worked with my class load."

### **School of well being**

For UCLA alumna Cristina De León-Menjivar, staying healthy in her post-college years is paramount to her overall well-being and prevention of diabetes, which runs in her family. "In high school, it was all about my life and what I wanted to do; I didn't really pay attention to others, even those in my family," she notes. "As I grew, I saw how my family became the victim of this disease that could be prevented. That was a moment of awakening."

De León-Menjivar's transformation occurred when she realized she didn't want to suffer from illness or obsess about food later in life. "In college, we inevitably begin to develop a bigger lens through which we see the world," she says. "I began to see how I wanted to live and what I needed to do to so that I might live that way."

By developing greater self-awareness during her college years, De León-Menjivar was able to take a more proactive approach to her health, including making the most of doctor appointments. "With proper research and information in hand, I now can make doctor's visits that much more valuable because I am asking the right questions," she adds. "My education has taught me the value of research -- and what is more important than researching about your health?"

### **Healthy priorities**

Similar to De León-Menjivar's story, which illustrates the Education Pays findings, experts say education helps you maintain healthy behaviors well beyond the college years. According to Bob Livingstone, licensed clinical social worker and author of *The Body Mind Soul Solution: Healing Emotional Pain through Exercise* (Pegasus Books, 2007), knowledge and experience gained through college can be maintained after a student graduates. Throughout life's challenges, when job and family responsibilities weigh down, he notes, graduates might stop working out and eating healthy, but will still have their healthy skill set to rely on.

"These young adults will, at some point, discover that they are not feeling at the top of their game and will recall their college routine of exercising and eating properly," says Livingstone. "Higher education teaches us how to discipline ourselves, and that skill will come into play at this transitional point in their lives. They will find the means to once again incorporate exercise and a healthy diet into their lifestyles."

De León-Menjivar adds, "I believe that educated people understand the value of a healthy lifestyle because we realize that this is a crucial factor in developing overall happiness and well-being. Being healthy is just as important as landing that high-paying job. You can't work as well if you are not healthy."