Mel Robbins Keypoints — Brain & Mental Health

Mel Robbins Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 18

#1 Neuroscientist: After Watching This, Your Brain Will Not Be the Same

Guest: Dr. Lara Boyd
Date: 2026-10-12 · Duration: 1:11:36
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OojWAavwEyg

KEYPOINTS

• Experience is the single largest driver of brain change

Dr. Lara Boyd, a neuroscientist at the University of British Columbia who runs its Brain Behaviour Lab, says there is no drug and no magic bullet for rewiring the brain. What reshapes it is what you actually do, again and again. Her lab can map where the brain changes in response to practice, which is why she frames change as something you build rather than something that happens to you.

• Learning changes the brain in three ways: chemistry, structure and function

Chemistry changes fast. Neurotransmitters, the small chemical signals passed between brain cells, shift within minutes, and that is the basis of short-term memory. Structural change is slower and is what turns practice into lasting memory and skill. Function, meaning how brain regions work together, changes as well. Boyd's point is that you are changing your brain chemistry during an ordinary conversation, but making it stick takes repetition.

• The brain stays plastic until your last breath

Boyd calls this the biggest finding of the last 30 years: you can change your brain at any age. Mel asks about her 82-year-old dad and 89-year-old mother-in-law, and Boyd says yes, both of them can still change. Her lab trains people up to 85 years old. Labels such as dyslexia don't remove that capacity. People simply learn differently, perhaps on a different scale or time frame.

• There is a 'sweet zone' of difficulty where change peaks

If a task is too easy, the brain doesn't need to adapt. If it is too hard, people quit. Using a game while scanning brains, her team found the most structural change when success rates sat around 50–60%. That zone differs from person to person and from day to day, so an off day simply reflects where your brain is that day. As long as it feels like a struggle, you are changing.

• After a stroke, there may be a 30–60 day window of heightened plasticity

Right after an injury, the brain is less inhibited and more excitable, which seems to support neuroplastic change. That window appears to last about 30–60 days, which lines up with when medical rehab happens. Lost functions can be partly taken up by other regions but are rarely as good as before. How healthy the brain was beforehand also matters a great deal, so a 20-year-old and a 70-year-old with the same injury can have very different outcomes.

• Sleep is when structural change consolidates

Boyd's message to her medical students is that you can cram all night, but you won't have learned it. In studies where people sleep inside an MRI scanner, the regions used to practice a task during the day light up again overnight, almost like practicing offline. To check whether you really learned something, test yourself the next day after sleep.

• Exercise releases BDNF, which she calls brain juice

Any exercise releases brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which helps neurons reorganize. The best type is whatever you enjoy, even a walk around the block. She adds that timing barely seems to matter: before practice, right after or later in the day all appear to work.

• Cortisol blocks the brain's 'parking spots' for growth

Boyd's analogy: your brain has a limited number of parking spots. If stress-hormone cortisol is parked in them, the trophic factors that enable change can't get in. Sleep, exercise and stress reduction are her three easiest levers for rewiring, and gratitude, mindfulness and self-compassion count as what she calls 'cortisol reducers.'

• First-person visualization is a realistic form of practice

Imagining a presentation from inside your own body, looking out at the audience, generates predictions about how it will feel. That engages the cerebellum, which predicts and corrects errors, so it works better than watching yourself from the outside. On manifesting, she is careful: it is 'tricky,' but priming the brain does have measurable effects. Optimism and morning affirmations such as 'today is going to be a great day' may lower cortisol and release dopamine.

• Attention determines what you can change

When you suddenly see the green Rivian pickup everywhere after deciding you like it, there aren't more trucks on the road. Your attention has shifted. Because attention feeds both learning and neuroplasticity, choosing what you focus on shapes what your brain becomes.

EXAMPLES

• The patient who 'broke' her

In the early 1990s, Boyd was a physical therapist who spent three months trying to help a young man with a severe head injury walk again so his family could take him home. Despite expert help, it didn't work. She felt like 'a car mechanic who didn't know how the engine worked,' and within two weeks she quit and applied for a PhD in neuroscience.

• Nine minutes of HIIT before practice

Her lab has participants, including stroke patients and 85-year-olds, cycle for three minutes at 85% of maximum effort, three times, and then practice a task. In one study, the exercise and rest groups looked the same right after practice. After a night's sleep, the exercise group had improved significantly. That suggests exercise mainly boosts overnight consolidation.

• Runners vs. yoga practitioners in the MRI

Boyd, a runner, expected the runners to win. Instead, when shown stressful images, the runners' amygdalas 'lit up like a fireball.' The yoga group, who took only two or three recreational classes a week, also activated memory structures, which suggests they could observe stress without being taken over by it. An ongoing study has burned-out teachers practice loving-kindness meditation for 30 days, with significant early changes in burnout and brain measures.

• Third-graders with lower math scores

A large study found a less-developed brain area in children with below-average math scores. Boyd reads this as a sign of

readiness, not inability. Those brains may not have matured enough yet for that level of math. This is the field of educational neuroscience.

- **Mel's Spanish 'prescription'**

  Mel, who is dyslexic and remembers nothing from seven years of French, asks whether she can learn Spanish. Boyd says yes, but it's hard: languages are special, and adults who heard only English as children face a steeper climb. Because Mel learns by ear, Boyd prescribes full immersion, such as speaking only Spanish on the Camino walk she is planning with her husband, Chris. Boyd's own daughter entered late French immersion, came home in tears for weeks, and was speaking French by Christmas.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Daily brain-health routine**

  Boyd's day: sleep well, start with something positive (gratitude or 'today will be great, and here's why'), exercise ('pay yourself first' in the morning, like savings), keep cortisol down with mindfulness and self-compassion, practice something hard, and stay socially engaged, which is linked to lower depression and better plasticity.

- **Tune difficulty, not just effort**

  Aim for roughly 50–60% success. If you're nailing it, raise the difficulty. If you're quitting, scale back. Expect that zone to move from day to day.

- **Practice, sleep, then test**

  Learn a little, sleep on it, and check the next day what actually stuck. Repeat. The amount of practice needed varies by person, a challenge her research calls 'the dose problem.' She rejects the idea of a magic 10,000 hours: every hour and every attempt changes the brain incrementally.

The ADHD Doctor: How to Focus, Stop Procrastinating, Manage Your Emotions, & Feel in Control

Guest: Dr. Sasha Hamdani
Date: 2026-08-20 · Duration: 1:07:25
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUPQImuDUng

KEYPOINTS

- **ADHD is a regulation problem, not just an attention problem.**
  Psychiatrist Dr. Sasha Hamdani describes ADHD as difficulty regulating attention, motivation, energy, emotion (which she calls 'a huge one'), sleep and appetite. If you only picture a jittery kid who can't sit still, you miss most of how it shows up, especially the emotional side, which doctors often put down to anxiety or depression.
- **The diagnostic criteria were built around hyperactive young boys, so women get missed at every life stage.**
  She walks through the pattern. A 13-year-old girl with mood swings and friendship struggles hears 'it's hormones.' Pregnancy's higher estrogen and dopamine can help, then the postpartum drop 'rocks your world' and gets labeled postpartum depression. Perimenopause brings another estrogen drop and brain fog, and the answer is 'you're hormonal, give it 10 years.' Mel says this described her whole life. She was diagnosed at 47 and says that once she found the right medication she finally 'felt like I was in my body.'
- **In the ADHD brain, feelings arrive loud and the brakes are slow.**
  In her deliberately simplified version, the frontal lobe (decision-making, judgment) is a bit thinner and less responsive, the amygdala (emotional alarm) is more reactive, and the connection between them is weaker. So you feel things strongly, and the thinking part is slow to filter the alarm.
- **There are three types, and girls usually show the quiet one.**
  Inattentive: daydreamers who are forgetful, disorganized, lose things and struggle to start or avoid big tasks. This is the most common presentation in girls. Hyperactive-impulsive: fidgeting, trouble staying seated, interrupting, blurting out answers. Combined: both. She herself is the combined type.
- **Untreated ADHD can look like anxiety and depression, and treating only those can miss the cause.**
  Constantly falling short of what you know you can do breeds anxiety. Bursts of energy followed by crashes look like depression. She has seen patients go through up to 10 medications with little relief, then improve dramatically once the ADHD was treated. Her analogy: giving a diabetic who's losing their vision glasses instead of treating the diabetes.
- **Masking is camouflaging your symptoms, conscious or not, and women are especially good at it.**
  From a young age, girls learn not to get in trouble or stand out, so they compensate. That makes ADHD harder to spot and more exhausting to live with.
- **Rejection sensitive dysphoria is common, and you can wait it out.**
  RSD is an intense emotional, and sometimes physical, flood in response to real or perceived rejection or criticism, or the fear of disappointing someone. She says almost everyone with ADHD has some version of it. Her tactics: move your body to get blood flow back to the thinking brain, and delay your reaction. She knows that in 10–15 minutes she'll feel different, so she sets an alarm and reassesses then.
- **Step 1 is to track symptoms for about two months before or during an evaluation.**
  Track three things in plain notes on your phone. Tasks: are you struggling to start, staying on track, or finishing? Sleep: how long, how fragmented, how hard to fall asleep. Mood: any format works. She wants enough data to cover two hormonal cycles so mood can be compared with your cycle.
- **Steps 2–4: see a qualified professional, discuss all the options, and use reputable sources while you wait.**
  She's biased toward psychiatrists because they're medical doctors who can rule out other causes. Options include medication, therapy, coaching, tools and systems, and being diagnosed doesn't automatically mean Adderall. Declining medication is 'a perfectly reasonable choice.' She found therapy to work out her own patterns and skills 'life-changing.' While you wait for an appointment, rely on journal articles or news that cites them, not random people online.
- **Stimulants work in peaks, while non-stimulants can cover 24 hours.**
  Stimulants (Adderall, Ritalin, Vyvanse) increase alertness and steer the brain toward reward, and she mentions a recent Washington University study on how they work. They're controlled substances, and coverage is short: about 2–4 hours for short-acting and usually 4–6 (up to 6–8) for long-acting, then they wear off quickly. Non-stimulants include some antidepressants and blood-pressure medications. Many act around the clock, and some help anxiety or depression at the same time. Medication decisions belong with your prescriber.

EXAMPLES

- **'Adderall for all the housewives'**
  When she mentioned her ADHD advocacy, another physician joked that she could 'give Adderall to all the housewives who need it.' She uses this to show the eye-rolls women get, even from doctors, for what she notes is classified as a protected disability in the U.S.
- **Suction-cupping herself to her chair**
  As a hyperactive kid who kept getting in trouble, she pressed her thighs into the seat and gripped the bottom of her chair to physically keep herself from getting up. That's masking.
- **A superpower you can't steer**
  Asked whether ADHD is a superpower, she says no. It's like being able to fly but not choosing when or where, so you 'blast off into space at any given time.' She credits hyperfocus for social media, a White House visit and book deals, but day to day she still feels limited.
- **Mel's timeline**

Years of anxiety, postpartum depression with 'sobbing as you're breastfeeding,' then perimenopausal brain fog. Hormone therapy helped other symptoms but not the fog. All of it was put down to anxiety until her ADHD diagnosis at 47.

• 'If I had 10 minutes left of my life'

For listeners who think 40, 50 or 60 is too late, Dr. Hamdani says she'd still want to know, because understanding your brain replaces years of guilt and shame and second-guessing with 'I did do my best.'

OTHER RELEVANT

• Two-month tracking sheet

Daily notes on task starting, staying on task and finishing; sleep length and interruptions; and mood. Bring it to the evaluation and keep tracking afterward to see whether treatment is closing the gaps.

• The 10–15 minute rule for emotional floods

Tell yourself 'I'm flooded,' set a timer for 10–15 minutes, move, and decide what to do after it goes off.

• Questions for a provider

Is this ADHD, anxiety, depression or hormones, or more than one? What are the stimulant and non-stimulant options? How long does each last? What non-medication supports are there?

#1 Brain Surgeon: What Your Dreams Are Trying to Tell You About Yourself

Guest: Dr. Rahul Jandial
Date: 2026-06-29 · Duration: 1:07:32
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIGmGupeD_I

KEYPOINTS

• Dreaming takes up about a third of your life, not just a few minutes a night

Dr. Rahul Jandial, a neurosurgeon, cancer surgeon and neuroscientist, says newer measurements show dreams can happen in any stage of sleep, including as you fall asleep and as you wake up. That is why he now estimates a third of our lives is spent dreaming. His framing: sleep is rest for the body, but the brain is 'on fire', with blood flowing and electricity firing, so it is not an idle screen-saver.

• Everybody dreams; 'I don't dream' really means 'I don't remember'

When the show polled its audience, 26% said they don't dream or don't remember dreams. Jandial says recall can be cultivated. Editors at his publisher reported remembering more dreams while working on his book, almost everyone remembers childhood nightmares, and after caring for some 15,000 patients he says dreams tend to return near the end of life.

• At night the brain's 'CEO' quiets down and the imagination and emotion systems take over

By day the executive network runs the show: getting on the subway, getting the kids to school. In dreaming, brain scans show that network dampened while the imagination network (loose, creative dot-connecting he calls 'creative ideation') and the limbic system (amygdala, hypothalamus and other emotional structures) are more active. Total brain activity is about the same as when you're awake. It's just a different mix.

• Dreams may keep unused parts of the mind 'warm'

Jandial's view, which he presents as his belief backed by some scan data, is that emotion, creativity, sexuality and imagination get a kind of high-intensity training at night. Without that rehearsal those capacities might be less available when we face challenges during the day. When you dream of running, the same motor neurons fire as in real running. The signal just stops at the spinal cord, which may make dreams a true form of rehearsal.

• The brain cycles through N1, N2, N3 and REM, and REM is where vivid dreaming peaks

Sleep entry is N1, followed by deeper N2 and N3. Scientists used to believe dreams happened mostly in REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. Now they know dreaming happens across stages. REM timing is the most fixed, and the late-night REM periods give the most vivid, best-remembered dreams, which matters for the lucid-dreaming technique below.

• A nightmare is a specific thing, and a flare of nightmares can be a mental-health warning sign

By his definition, a nightmare isn't just a bad dream. It is terrifying and it wakes you up. Everyone has them. When people who think they're coping well suddenly get more nightmares, he treats it like a headache or pain: a vital sign that something unprocessed is going on and a prompt to ask whether you're really living well. He adds that nightmares are also linked to more serious risks, including suicide, so persistent ones deserve attention.

• Many common dreams seem built into the brain, but their meaning is often unknowable

Falling, flying and being chased show up in half to two-thirds of dream reports, across cultures and centuries, including before airplanes existed. Jandial takes that consistency as evidence the brain generates these dreams partly on autopilot. He's openly humble here. Asked why people dream of teeth falling out, he says 'I don't know,' noting only that it correlates a bit with teeth grinding.

• Some dreams are obvious and some are best treated as prompts for reflection

He describes several categories of dreams, starting with the 'obvious' one, like showing up naked to a talk you're anxious about. He doesn't decode symbols. He suggests that a dream caught in the morning offers another view of your own experiences, one a therapist can't have because it's 'in my head.' He calls it a free wellness tool and a kind of 'nocturnal therapist,' while admitting that PTSD dreams can keep trauma alive.

• The minutes when you're falling asleep and waking up are a creative window

Those 5–15 minutes carry electrical signatures of both waking and sleep. Jandial says he has used the waking window for decades as an idea generator, staying in bed without grabbing his phone. Artists have long described the same thing. The recall he means is subtle: a lingering emotion, an image, a different way of thinking about a problem, not a crisp replay.

EXAMPLES

• Dreams changing years before Parkinson's

In men who develop Parkinson's in their 50s, he says more than 90% show a change in dreaming roughly 15 years earlier: REM behavior disorder, where they physically act out their dreams. In Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, dream reports also shift toward animals, not pets but 'beasts.'

• Vietnam veterans and divorce

His example of dreams reflecting life stress: there were reports of Vietnam veterans whose war dreams returned when they went through a divorce.

• Erotic dreams and 'cheating'

Surveys put sex dreams near universal (90%+ when asked about 'erotic' dreams), and about 80% involve infidelity. Long-term studies of families show these dreams start even before puberty. For people in happy relationships he thinks it 'means nothing.' It's only telling if you're already wanting to cheat or are unhappy.

• His late father showing up at big moments

Jandial's dad died seven years ago. He says his 'pops' returns in dreams at major occasions, such as when one of his adult sons recently reached a goal. He links dreams of lost loved ones to processing grief, and in his cancer patients those dreams can move from fear to a welcome experience.

• Mel's watched-a-horror-movie nightmare

Jandial admits he falls asleep with Netflix on. Mel says she has watched a scary movie and then had a nightmare. He says

the content of the last 5–10 minutes before sleep does influence dreams, though not in a straight line.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Sleep-entry ritual**
  As you drift off, repeat: 'I will dream and I will remember my dreams.' Be deliberate about what you look at or think about in the last 5–10 minutes, because it can shape what you dream about. He cites Salvador Dalí's writing on using this window.
- **Sleep-exit ritual**
  Wake slowly. Don't move or reach for anything. Hold on to emotions, images and thoughts for 5–7 minutes, then jot them down (he uses his phone; Mel prefers a notepad by the bed so she won't get sucked into social media). Lower the bar: write down feelings and ideas, not a full dream plot.
- **Rescripting recurring nightmares**
  One treatment for recurring nightmares is to write a happier, kinder ending to the nightmare in a journal before bed, using the power of suggestion. Persistent or trauma-linked nightmares are worth raising with a professional.
- **Lucid-dreaming steps he favors**
  He favors this method because it was verified with brain measurements. Set an alarm 5–6 hours after falling asleep (bed at 10, alarm around 3–4 a.m.) to catch late REM. Stay groggy, then tell yourself 'I'm going to fall back asleep, but I'm going to be awake in my dream.' Watch for dream signs like a weird clock or extra fingers, and repeat on other nights. About a third of people lucid dream naturally. Researchers have confirmed it in labs, with sleeping subjects signaling through eye-movement codes.
- **His book: This Is Why You Dream**
  Two of its nine chapters cover lucid dreaming, which he says turned out to be the most rigorously studied dream type.

#1 Neurologists: 5 Habits to Boost Brain Health & Prevent Alzheimer's

Guest: Dr. Ayesha Sherzai and Dr. Dean Sherzai
Date: 2026-04-09 · Duration: 1:22:27
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BdY8JO6ups

KEYPOINTS

• Dementia builds for 20+ years before the first symptom

Neurologists Dr. Ayesha and Dr. Dean Sherzai, authors of The Alzheimer's Solution, describe a preclinical stage with no memory problems while amyloid plaques, tau tangles, inflammation, vascular changes and atrophy may already be accumulating. Contributors they list include chronic stress, poor sleep, high cholesterol, loneliness, untreated sleep apnoea and unhealthy habits. Their message: the change is in your hands, whether you're 9 or 90.

• Lifestyle can prevent or delay a large share of cases, with caveats

Dean says around 60% of people with pre-Alzheimer's or mild cognitive impairment (MCI) can be helped to prevent or significantly delay dementia, a figure he calls proven. He says higher figures like 90% are extrapolation and is careful to separate the two. Advanced dementia, he notes, is far harder to reverse, though it can still be slowed.

• The NEURO plan has five pillars

N is nutrition, E exercise, U unwind (handle major stressors, mindfulness, deeper rest), R restorative sleep, and O optimise (challenge your brain, find purpose, stay social). Their claim is that the habits stack: in one study, doing one or two cut Alzheimer's risk by about 30%, and doing four cut it by about 60%.

• Your brain is mostly connections, and you can keep building them

With string-and-knot props, they show that neurons can share tens of thousands of connections. Stress, poor sleep and inactivity cut those strings, which is what 'shrinking your brain' means, and once severed many never reconnect. Healthy habits let neurons sprout new connections, they say even at 80, 90 or 100.

• Cognitive reserve is a buffer you deposit into over decades

In their marble-jar demo, each bad night or junk-food stretch pours marbles out. Someone who invested in brain health can lose some to a minor brain injury or years of caregiving and still have plenty left. Someone who didn't has little to spare.

• Chronic stress literally shrinks the memory centre

Ayesha says bad stress releases hormones that block information from being stored, raises inflammation and oxidative damage, and keeps you in fight-or-flight even when you look calm. She cites studies showing smaller brains, especially a smaller hippocampus, under chronic stress. She distinguishes this from the good stress of learning new things.

• Caregivers face their own elevated risk

Mel reads a passage from their book: partners of people who develop dementia had a 600% greater risk of developing it themselves than a matched population. The authors attribute this to shared lifestyle factors as well as the chronic stress of caregiving.

• Head injuries count

A significant head trauma, or many smaller ones, raises later risk. The fluid around the brain doesn't cushion much, so the brain can bounce off the ridged inside of the skull. Their advice is to choose activities with that in mind.

• Leg strength protects the brain at both ends of life

Older people most often land in the emergency room from falls; the Sherzais recently lost Ayesha's mother after a fall. They also call the legs a bigger pump of blood than the heart and say leg strength builds brain volume in younger people.

• Creativity and 'idea density' are protective

Dean calls creativity the brain's ultimate purpose, and says people who keep pushing it into new things build their brains late in life. The famous Nun Study is their main evidence (see examples).

EXAMPLES

• Normal forgetting versus a red flag

Walking into the kitchen and forgetting why is normal: with age, competing information means the memory never got properly filed. Forgetting close family members' names daily, or constant lapses, warrants a neurologist visit for imaging and blood tests that can catch quickly reversible causes like B12 deficiency or thyroid disorders.

• The Nun Study

Several hundred nuns donated their brains and diaries to science. Some brains showed heavy shrinkage, amyloid and tau, yet the nuns had been cognitively normal; others had little damage but had Alzheimer's. The protected group's diaries showed complex language, larger vocabulary and high 'idea density'.

• The leg-strength twin study

In people with MCI, one sibling did leg strengthening (leg press, lunges, squats) while the other stretched, for about 30–45 minutes, three or four times a week over six months. Dean cites a 47% lower rate of progressing to Alzheimer's; the figure was also described as 47% having normal memory tests afterwards.

• Ayesha went to cooking school in scrubs

Realising advice had to work for someone standing at their fridge in South Central LA, she worked ICU mornings at Columbia Presbyterian, then ran to a New York cooking school at 7pm, earning the degree in two years, and now teaches patients to cook.

• One handful of greens a day

They cite studies linking the MIND diet to 53% lower Alzheimer's risk, and one daily serving of leafy greens (raw, cooked or frozen spinach, kale or collards) with a brain about 11 years younger.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Brain-food list

Mostly plants: leafy greens; broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower; walnuts and almonds; flax and chia; beans, lentils, tofu and tempeh; coffee and tea; spices. Any grocery store, nothing to buy from anyone.

• Brisk walk, 20–25 minutes, five days a week

Dean cites a Harvard study linking it to roughly 40% lower Alzheimer's risk and dismisses heart-rate 'zones' as program marketing. Doing it first thing in the morning also resets your circadian rhythm.

• Leg day in front of the TV

Stand in front of the couch and do 10 partial squats (about 60°, not 90°) during your favourite show, or mini squats for 60 seconds while the microwave runs.

• Fixed wake-up time

Wake at the same time every day; your body will gradually adjust when it needs sleep, so you don't have to force a bedtime.

• Optimise with real challenge

Learn something new, join a book club, or play games with children or grandchildren once or twice a week. 'A cathedral was built one brick at a time.'

12 Minutes to a Better Brain: Neuroscientist Reveals the #1 Habit for Clarity & Focus

Guest: Dr. Amishi Jha
Date: 2025-10-27 · Duration: 1:20:08
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0kgtH0pJ2A

KEYPOINTS

• Attention is the brain's boss, powerful but fragile

Cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Amishi Jha, author of Peak Mind, says wherever attention goes, the rest of the brain's processing aligns with it. Her metaphor is a flashlight: whatever it points at becomes crisper and clearer while everything else dulls. Attention can be captured by outside pings and by your own thoughts. Her hopeful message is that it's trainable.

• There are three attention systems: flashlight, floodlight and juggler

The flashlight is selective attention, or focus: narrow and directed, aimed at the outside world or inward at a thought. The floodlight is the alerting system: broad and receptive, as when you suddenly hit a school zone or brainstorm with all options open, and it only works in the present. The juggler is executive function, keeping goals and actions aligned, such as planning a trip to the airport.

• Flashlight and floodlight compete

Being narrowly focused and broadly receptive at once isn't possible; she says the two systems battle each other in the brain. Choosing which mode a situation needs, for example going into a social event warm and open versus locked on one task, is part of using attention well.

• Multitasking doesn't exist; it's task-switching

You have one flashlight, not five. Juggling several demanding tasks means repeatedly engaging and disengaging, which she likens to grinding car gears and calls 'a terrible way' to spend attentional energy. Her guidance: monotask as much as possible and don't treat multitasking as a badge of honour.

• Attention peaks from about 25 to 35, then declines

All three systems aren't fully developed until about 25, followed by a roughly 10-year peak. After 35 comes a normal, healthy-ageing decline, partly due to habits, she says. That vulnerability is why her lab focuses on training to keep attention in peak shape.

• Long stretches of high demand drain attention

Across her studies, attention gets worse over demanding periods: students over a semester just before finals, athletes over pre-season training before competition, and service members before deployment. Stress and depleted attention then feed each other with more distraction, irritability and mood dips. Mel recognised the cycle from a hard stretch of her own: more scrolling, procrastinating and irritability.

• Worrying about the future taxes attention like the real thing

Attention is internal as well as external, so mentally simulating stressful scenarios also depletes it. Mel summarises it as: rumination weakens your attention before the event you're worried about even arrives. Jha's phrase for it is 'don't deploy before you deploy'.

• Twelve minutes is the minimum effective dose

In early studies with military service members and firefighters, participants were told to do 30 minutes daily and log honestly. Almost no one did 30; practice ranged from zero up. Using objective attention and some brain measures, 12 minutes or more protected and strengthened attention, while less did not. More practice brings more benefit, like push-ups.

• The prescription: 12 minutes a day, 4 days a week, for at least 4 weeks

Follow-up studies prescribed 12 minutes. People complied far more than with 30, though most didn't manage seven days, and four days a week proved enough. Under stress, practisers' attention, mood and stress levels stayed stable while comparison groups declined. Without high stress, people improved beyond baseline. She declines to promise happiness, but says people become more aware and better able to steer attention.

• A wandering mind during practice is a win

Many expect meditation to feel blissful and are disappointed to find 'my mind is a mess'. Noticing that you drifted and bringing attention back is the exercise, which she calls the 'push-up for the mind': focus, notice, refocus, repeat. Over time you may notice what you tend to drift toward. She calls this developing a friendship with your own mind.

EXAMPLES

• Jha couldn't pay attention, as an attention scientist

In her first faculty job at the University of Pennsylvania, with a young child, a husband in grad school and a 100-year-old fixer-upper, she was the go-to media expert on attention yet felt she couldn't focus. Telling herself to 'get it together' didn't work, which sent her into the research on solutions.

• 'Don't deploy before you deploy'

Mel cites page 156 of Peak Mind: a service member's wife, Cynthia, kept telling her husband this because he was mentally gone weeks before each deployment, missing time with his kids and spouse while still at home.

• How 12 minutes was discovered

Most mindfulness programmes ask for 45 minutes, seven days a week. Her team assumed 30 would be more realistic, found that almost no one did it, and used the honest practice logs to find the 12-minute threshold. She compares it to needing about 150 minutes of cardio a week for heart benefits.

• Adapting for attention difficulties

For groups with particular needs, such as people with attention-deficit issues, programmes started with much shorter practices. They built up to 12 minutes only by the end of eight weeks, so the right ramp varies by person.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **'Find your flashlight' breath practice**
  Sit comfortably, alert and centred. Use the sensations of breathing as your anchor. When your mind wanders, notice where it went and gently bring it back. The goal is finding the flashlight again, not keeping it fixed.
- **Start at 3 minutes and stack it onto a habit**
  The best time is whenever you'll actually do it, so attach it to brushing your teeth or morning coffee. Mel plans to swap 22 minutes of social media and email with coffee for a 3-minute timer. Do 3 minutes, four days a week, then 6 minutes, then 12.
- **Use a timer, and consider a buddy**
  Set a timer to keep it simple, or FaceTime a friend at a set time, such as 9am, and both sit with eyes closed for three minutes.
- **Round out with the body scan**
  Her full four-week plan, written out day by day at the end of her book, adds practices like the body scan, which moves the flashlight systematically through the body.
- **Monotask**
  Batch and sequence demanding tasks instead of switching, to save attention for what matters.

You Can Change Your Brain: Neuroscientist Explains How to Rewire Your Mind & Stop Negative Thoughts

Guest: Dr. Caroline Leaf
Date: 2025-07-10 · Duration: 1:08:05
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CESqNpTK1S8

KEYPOINTS

- **Leaf's core idea: your mind drives your brain, and your brain can change.**
  Dr. Caroline Leaf, a cognitive neuroscientist who has researched the mind-brain connection since the early 1980s, says 'this brain does absolutely nothing except what you tell it to do with your mind.' She calls the mind '99% of who you are.' You can't change your story, she says, but you can change how it sits inside you and how it plays out in the future. These are her framings; the conversation didn't get into how other researchers view them.
- **She challenged the 1980s view that brain damage was permanent.**
  As a young female student in a male-dominated lecture hall, Leaf put up her hand when she was taught that after brain injury or trauma you can only teach patients to compensate. Her argument: people constantly learn and grow, and the brain hosts the mind, so the brain must be able to change. Neuroplasticity has since become mainstream.
- **She calls anxiety and depression 'emotional warning signals,' not things.**
  Leaf argues these labels aren't like diabetes. They're signals that you're out of alignment and need to pay attention. Her analogy: if your hand is on a burning stove, all the ibuprofen in the world won't fix it; you have to move your hand. She also claimed '95% of lifestyle diseases come from our thought life' and called it established fact. Treat that figure as her claim, not consensus. This isn't a reason to stop treatment or medication.
- **The Neurocycle has five steps: gather awareness, reflect, write, recheck, active reach.**
  Leaf calls it a formula rather than a technique, meant to trace warning signals back to the thought and its root, then reshape it. She notes people tend to be good at the early steps, like breathing and naming feelings, then crash. She compares that to years of therapy spent getting good at talking about problems without ever moving to solving them.
- **Before starting, calm your body. The 10-second pause is her go-to.**
  Any visualization, breathing or meditation works, eyes open or closed. For anger, she suggests breathing in for 2 counts, holding for 2, and out for 6, silently saying 'let' over the first three counts and 'go' over the last three. She says the conscious mind works in roughly 10-second bursts. Mel pointed out how neatly 'let go' lines up with her Let Them idea.
- **Gather awareness with four questions.**
  What am I feeling? Answer in one or two words, like nervous or frustrated. Where do I feel it in my body: tense shoulders, racing heart, sweating? What am I doing or about to say? What's my perspective right now, for example 'this is going to be a lousy day, I can't handle this'? Answering in order, she says, brings 'order out of chaos.'
- **Then reflect, mindstorm on paper, and recheck.**
  Reflect means sorting the who, what, when and why. The writing step is a messy 'mindstorm': dump the 'tsunami' on paper (my boss, another mistake, I'm a loser, never good enough). Recheck means looking at what you wrote for the pattern. On day one, simply noticing the link may be enough.
- **Active reach: do one small thing to get through the day.**
  If you don't know what to do, start with a short phrase you repeat, like 'It's okay to be a mess' or 'Well done, I'm starting to see something,' possibly paired with an image such as a flower. The point is a daily, deliberate action that starts to build the new pattern.
- **Changing a deep pattern takes about 63 days, not 21.**
  Leaf says the first 21 days are hard and up-and-down; the next 42 stabilize the change into a habit. People tend to quit around days 14, 21 or 28 because they feel better, and then slide back. She recommends one Neurocycle a day.
- **In a spiral, name it out loud, with a 'because,' immediately.**
  Her '63-second' reset starts with acknowledgement: say out loud or in your head, 'This text makes me feel ___ because ___.' She says keeping it in 'builds up the wrong hormones,' like holding back tears in grief. Adding the 'because' often surfaces a solution or shows that the other person's reaction is their perception, which you don't have to take on.

EXAMPLES

- **The teenager thrown from a car**
  In the 1980s, coma beyond 8 hours was considered irreversible brain damage. The girl's parents begged Leaf to work with her. Over 8 months, during which Leaf developed the five-step process, the girl regained function, made up most of 12th grade, graduated with her class, excelled at math despite having been a C-and-D student, and earned a university degree. Physical damage to her larynx and walking remained. This is Leaf's own account of a single case.
- **Mel's walk to the 17th floor**
  Mel ran the steps live on her law-firm job in Boston, which she took after leaving her dream job as a New York public defender. She recalled the train, the pit in her stomach, the walk past Dunkin' Donuts, saying hello to Ralph at the front desk, and the elevator to the 17th floor, noting there was no 13th. Naming the 'pure and utter dread' was enough for day one.
- **The 'we need to talk' text**
  Leaf's example: the text hits and your heart races. Say, 'This text makes me feel terrified because I think they're going to break up with me.' Mel did the same with a business email that made her feel she was in trouble, and traced it to a familiar old 'I did something wrong' thought.
- **Wiggling your toes in a tense conversation**
  When someone says something awful and you can't respond in kind, Leaf suggests wiggling your toes to stay grounded, silently repeating what they said, or pretending to take notes and writing down what they said. No one has to see the paper.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Let-go breath**
  In for 2, hold for 2, out for 6, saying 'let' for counts 1–3 and 'go' for counts 4–6. Use it before the Neurocycle or in a heated moment.
- **Daily Neurocycle checklist**
  Calm the body. Answer the four awareness questions: feeling, body, behavior, perspective. Reflect on who, what, when and why. Mindstorm on paper. Recheck for the pattern. Pick one active-reach phrase or action. Repeat daily for 63 days.
- **Caveat on the bigger claims**
  The '95% of lifestyle diseases' figure and the coma recovery are Leaf's statements. Use the tools as self-management practice alongside, not instead of, medical or psychological care.

The Ultimate Guide to the Female Brain: Neuroscientist Reveals How to Boost Mood, Energy, & Focus

Guest: Dr. Sarah McKay
Date: 2025-06-26 · Duration: 1:15:16
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-M6T9k3Mb8o

KEYPOINTS

• Your brain isn't broken; it adapts

Oxford-trained neuroscientist Dr. Sarah McKay, author of The Women's Brain Book, says the cultural focus on brain fog, 'baby brain' and burnout tells a story of what goes wrong. Neuroscience, she says, shows brains are adaptable and resilient at every life stage. She clarifies that she's talking about biological sex, not gender identity, while also noting how gendered experiences shape the brain.

• 'Female brains are wired for emotion, male brains for logic' is false

McKay rejects the idea of a male brain wired one way and a female brain wired another. Men feel emotions and women are logical. Intuition is a human trait built from experience and wisdom, not a sex difference. Many supposed differences, she argues, are shaped by how society treats girls and boys.

• Three forces shape your brain: bottom-up, outside-in and top-down

Based on the biopsychosocial model, she describes three streams. Bottom-up is your body: hormones, food, muscle tension, gut signals. Outside-in is your senses and surroundings: daylight, people, your environment and your phone, which has become a big influence in the last decade or two. Top-down is thoughts, expectations and past experiences. They affect each other; loneliness, for example, can shape depression.

• The brain builds itself fastest in early childhood

Growth in the first year of life is about five times faster than in the next five years. By around age five, the brain is at roughly 80–90% of where it will be for life and contains almost all the neurons it will ever have. After that, development is mostly about the connections between neurons (synapses).

• Sleep is when memories are filed away

During sleep, the brain sorts the day's experiences and moves memories from short-term into long-term storage. McKay says poor sleep is a risk factor for poor mental and brain health, raises the risk of almost every health condition, and is linked to higher mortality. She notes that one bad night makes everything harder, including looking after yourself.

• Your brain responds to your cycle, but the experience varies widely

Women have roughly 450 periods in a lifetime. Daily brain scans show networks becoming more integrated and specialized when estrogen peaks around ovulation, with a lag of a couple of days. Before a period, as progesterone rises, different networks interact more with each other. Hormone levels follow similar patterns in everyone, yet some women feel 'an absolute emotional roller coaster' and others barely a ripple.

• The pill flattens natural hormone swings, and McKay says it doesn't harm the brain

McKay calls the oral contraceptive pill an excellent form of contraception. It flattens your natural hormone pattern and replaces it with steadier, higher pill hormones, depending on the formulation. Asked if it hurts the brain, she says no; the scans show a shift in brain networks, not damage.

• Pregnancy reorganizes the brain for motherhood; 'baby brain' isn't the right story

Little was published on this until around 2017. Scans now show roughly 4% brain volume loss during pregnancy. McKay frames it as streamlining and pruning, like the thinning seen in teenage brains, not damage. Mothers' brain networks look more flexible, efficient and responsive. She argues 'baby brain' often covers for a lack of support and the mental load mothers carry.

• Menopause brain fog may come largely from disrupted sleep

In perimenopause, the ovaries' signals to the brain become erratic, then estrogen flattens after menopause. Estrogen helps set the brain's temperature 'thermostat,' which narrows, so a small rise triggers a hot flash. About 70% of night-time flashes disrupt sleep, even if you don't remember waking. Mel summarizes McKay's view: the fog builds up from months or years of broken sleep, not only from missing estrogen. McKay says HRT can reset the thermostat and is one of the best treatments for hot flashes.

• Other people may be the biggest factor in your health

McKay warns that focusing only on hormones, which we can't always change, takes away agency. Research often finds that other people are the strongest determinant of health outcomes. Her advice on connection applies to men too; she gets emotional imagining her teenage sons lonely.

EXAMPLES

• 2023 study: nearly 8,000 brain scans across 29 countries

Researchers ranked countries on gender equality (Denmark and Sweden high; Brazil, Turkey and India lower). In more equal countries, male and female brains were more similar. The difference came from women's brains in unequal countries; male brains looked the same everywhere. Researchers suspect access to education and the stress of structural sexism.

• Who's 'super smart'? Kids aged 5–6 vs 7–8

In research from a New York group, five- and six-year-olds picked their own sex as 'super smart,' and all wanted to play the game 'for super smart children.' By seven or eight, both boys and girls picked the man, and many girls said the game was 'for the boys.'

• '28 and Me' and '28 and OC'

Women scientists, whom McKay calls 'the Marie Curie of neuroscience,' scanned their own brains daily for a whole cycle, taking blood samples to track hormones. They repeated it on the oral contraceptive pill.

• Scientists who scanned their own pregnancies

In 2009, three women researchers in Spain asked what happens to the brain in pregnancy, found no research, and decided to study themselves. Their work, plus a more recent study of one researcher who scanned her brain all the way through pregnancy, opened up the field of the maternal brain.

• Waking up in a puddle

McKay, at 50, says night-time hot flashes feel like being woken by a fright, with adrenaline, because the brain has to wake you to cool down. Mel describes soaked sheets on her side of the bed.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Check all three forces

When your mood or focus dips, look beyond hormones: sleep and body signals, your environment and screens, and your thoughts and expectations.

• Push back on 'baby brain'

McKay's suggestion: instead of blaming your brain, look at where you need support. It shouldn't be up to the mother alone to ask for it.

• Protect sleep in midlife

If night sweats are breaking your sleep, talk to a doctor about treatment. McKay calls HRT one of the best treatments for hot flashes, and better sleep may ease the fog. Speak to your own clinician.

• Invest in connection

Relationships may matter more than hormones. Prioritize the people who keep you from feeling lonely.

Unlock Your Brain’s Hidden Power: 6 Tools to Boost Focus, Confidence, and Creativity

Guest: Dr. Jeff Karp
Date: 2024-11-28 · Duration: 1:10:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jH1L2pXtPaw

KEYPOINTS

• Adult life runs on an "algorithmic lifestyle" that flattens creativity

Dr. Jeff Karp, who runs a medical-innovation lab at Brigham and Women's Hospital and teaches at Harvard Medical School and MIT, argues that creativity is something everyone is born with but society and schooling flatten. As kids everything is new; as adults we wake at the same time, eat the same breakfast, scroll the same sites and see the same people. His book Lit offers "life ignition tools" to break that single track and tap what he calls your evolutionary inheritance: the capacity to sense, learn, feel awe and create.

• Do new: small novelty opens new possibilities

Karp's first tool is to deliberately inject something new, even into your thinking. He handed Mel prism glasses that turned studio lights into rainbows, a simple frame shift that sparks curiosity. Stopping to watch clouds move is another; it pulls you out of rumination and into the moment, which he says is the actual process behind "be present."

• Press pause: real breaks let the brain connect ideas

After days of back-to-back meetings that felt like "two marathons" but left something missing, Karp began taking 5–10 minute breaks between meetings with no email, texting or social media, just doing nothing or walking. He found himself linking something someone said months earlier to the meeting he'd just had, sparking new collaborations. His view is that subconscious information needs time to swirl and settle.

• Learning consolidates in the pauses

Karp cites neuroscientist and musician Molly Gebrian, who told him "it's in the pauses that mind turns into matter": the rewiring happens during breaks and sleep, not only during practice. Rather than an hour straight, she recommends 15–20 minutes of practice, a 5–10 minute break, then returning. Coming back reveals what you forgot, which focuses attention and helps the skill stick.

• Fall in love with practice by varying it

Practice gets monotonous, so change how you do it. Karp interviewed five-time US memory champion Nelson Dellis, who started training his memory after a family member developed Alzheimer's; when card memorization gets boring, Dellis adds extra cards to the deck to create a new challenge. Karp ties enjoyment to persistence: if practice has joy in it, you keep going and notice the small "click" of incremental progress.

• Focus beyond failure: treat it as a prerequisite, not the opposite of success

Karp says nothing came easily to him. He was rejected by all three medical schools he applied to, booed off stage singing in high school, and lost student council races until his final year. He now sees failure as a chance to learn and explore options he hadn't considered, and drops the expectation of succeeding the first time.

• Flip the switch: a four-step way out of autopilot

Step 1: notice your inner desire for another possibility. Step 2: take stock of what's working and what's holding you back, acknowledging what works is empowering. Step 3: look for other possibilities and ways of thinking, often by talking to people who think differently. Step 4: take one deliberate step forward. Mel notes she does this by reaching out to a trusted friend for advice.

• Pinch your brain: use intention to direct attention

Pick any object, like a pen, mug or tree bark, and study its colors, textures, light and writing. This squeezes out other thoughts and can interrupt overwhelm, doom-scrolling or rumination. Karp calls each round "a bicep curl for your attention," especially useful with ADHD, when a huge advertising and marketing industry is competing to hijack it.

• Diversity of thinking is a creative engine

Karp deliberately limits overlapping expertise in his lab. He has had chemists, materials scientists, immunologists, a GI surgeon, a cardiac surgeon and a dentist, from about 30 countries. Different training means different wiring, which he says is how the sparks start. The lab's work includes a nasal spray tested against COVID-19 and flu, and a needle that delivers gene therapy to the back of the eye, now headed to a clinical trial.

EXAMPLES

• Lab presentation competitions

Everyone from high schoolers to faculty gives a three-minute talk on a passion, not their research. Feedback must be constructive, and the lab votes on best talk, most risk-taking and best feedback. Talks have included a rap about Boston burger places, a wetsuit surfing talk, a backyard permaculture project and a family bakery closed by COVID, which got people connecting.

• Fifteen seconds of silence at TEDMED

Karp rehearsed a 15-minute memorized talk endlessly, even renting MIT's Kresge Auditorium. Live-streamed at the Kennedy Center, he realized mid-talk he'd skipped a line and froze for 15 seconds. He clicked forward to a blank slide, then recovered. Learning he could stop and find his place again freed him from years of presentation anxiety.

• Mel's speaking advice: say "I'm excited"

Mel tells Karp the audience doesn't know what you were supposed to say, people root for visible vulnerability, and if you freeze, joke about it. She cites Harvard research that reframing nerves as "I'm so excited" helps keep your nervous system from hijacking your prefrontal cortex. Karp adds neuroscientist Rudy Tanzi's pre-talk line: "I am here to serve."

• From efficiency addict to present father

Diagnosed with ADHD and learning differences in seventh grade, Karp drilled efficiency until he was hooked on work's dopamine: networking at kids' birthday parties, pacing soccer fields for 10,000 steps, watching Game of Thrones on dog walks.

COVID's "unintentional pause" showed him his son was suddenly a high school quarterback. Through his wife's spiritual teachers he began Transcendental Meditation; in two to three months he learned to let urges pass, and now notices when he's about to hijack his kids' conversations.

- **"Set your sights lower"**
  As a C-and-D student, Karp was told to aim lower than becoming a doctor. His mother wrote school speeches with him and helped him memorize one word, then a sentence, then more, until he was winning competitions. His message to struggling kids: things are changeable, and every person needs one area where they feel that progress.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Schedule true five-minute pauses**
  Between meetings, step away from all screens. Walk, look at the sky, or do nothing, and notice which ideas connect.
- **Practice in 15–20 minute blocks**
  Whether it's guitar or a new work skill, break after 15–20 minutes for 5–10, then return and notice what slipped.
- **Label early attempts "Gen 1.0"**
  Before his first Stanford talk on Lit, Karp told himself it was version one and focused on gathering cues to make 2.0 better. Mel took a similar approach with drafts of The Let Them Theory.
- **Pinch your brain when you start to spiral**
  Grab the nearest object and describe its details to yourself until the worry loosens its grip.

Dr. Gabor Maté: The Shocking Link Between ADHD, Addiction, Autoimmune Diseases, & Trauma

Guest: Dr. Gabor Maté
Date: 2024-11-21 · Duration: 1:03:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLvCXIvgrGQ

KEYPOINTS

• Childhood conditions are both physical and emotional

Maté, a physician and author of Scattered Minds, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and When the Body Says No, defines childhood conditions broadly. They include nutrition, housing and protection, but also whether a child feels seen and understood, and the parents' own stress, unresolved trauma, conflict, money worries and isolation. All of this, he argues, shapes a child's personality and brain development.

• Maté sees ADHD as an adaptation, not a purely genetic disease

He argues that genes create predisposition, not predetermination. What he thinks is inherited is sensitivity. A sensitive child in a stressed home can't escape or fight back, so they tune out, and that gets wired in while the brain is developing. He points out that rising diagnosis rates can't be explained by genes, which don't change in a population within decades. He acknowledges this view goes against what most physicians are taught.

• The brain is a social organ

He describes it as established brain science that a child's brain circuitry develops in interaction with emotional relationships from the womb onwards. Stress on the mother during pregnancy can affect dopamine receptor numbers, and in mice, isolation lowers them while companionship restores them. Stimulant medications raise dopamine. He links ADHD to poverty, racism, maternal postpartum depression and prenatal stress, while insisting "there's no parent blaming here."

• A diagnosis describes; it doesn't explain

"Why are they hyperactive? Because they have ADHD. How do we know? Because they're hyperactive." Maté calls this circular reasoning. Descriptions are useful, but to understand why someone tunes out or struggles with impulse control, you have to look at how their life acted on their genes.

• "Acting out" means expressing a need without words

As in charades, children act out what they can't say. Instead of controlling or punishing the behaviour, parents should ask what is being expressed, because changing the relationship changes the behaviour. He's not against medication and has both prescribed and taken it, but says it shouldn't be the first or only step, it does nothing for long-term brain development, and no child should feel acceptable only when sedated.

• Addiction is any behaviour you crave and can't give up despite harm

His definition: temporary relief or pleasure, craving, negative consequences, and an inability to stop. When he asks a room of 1,000 people if they've had such a pattern, nearly all raise their hands. Both ADHD and addiction involve weak impulse regulation and the dopamine system, and he cites figures that 30% or more of stimulant addicts may be diagnosable with ADHD. "The problem isn't lack of free will but lack of a free won't."

• Don't ask why the addiction; ask why the pain

Asked what alcohol gave her, Mel says belonging, relief and a way to turn her brain off. Maté reframes addiction as an attempt to solve emotional pain and isolation. The body's own opioids, endorphins, relieve physical and emotional pain, create pleasure and support bonding. People whose early lives undermined that system go looking for substitutes.

• He links four traits to autoimmune disease

Around 80% of autoimmune diseases, such as MS, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Crohn's and psoriasis, occur in women. From his family-medicine and palliative-care practice, he noticed four common patterns: putting others' emotional needs first, identifying with duty and role, being "very nice" by repressing healthy anger, and feeling responsible for others' feelings. Citing psychoneuroimmunology, he argues that suppressing anger, a boundary defence, also disrupts the immune system, another boundary defence. He frames this as cultural, not about gender.

• Attachment versus authenticity

Children need attachment, meaning belonging and acceptance, and authenticity, meaning connection to their own gut feelings. When being authentic threatens attachment, children give up authenticity. As adults, we can choose differently. Mel connects this to her Let Them approach of separating other people's emotions from her own responsibility.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's late ADHD diagnosis and her son Oakley

Mel was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia at 46 while her son Oakley was being evaluated. His school called it "behavioural," but testing at Mass General, which the family couldn't have afforded three years earlier, changed his path. Remembering her years as a public defender, she notes how many incarcerated people had undiagnosed ADHD. Maté: "We're hurting people for having been hurt." Mel also says moving from a hectic Boston life to Vermont changed her family.

• Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

Maté worked there for 12 years in what he calls North America's most concentrated area of drug use, where many patients had undiagnosed ADHD. One sex worker told him that the first time she used heroin, it "felt like a warm soft hug."

• Vietnam veterans and rat studies

Soldiers who used opioids in Vietnam but came home to supportive environments often didn't stay addicted. In lab studies, stressed and isolated rats easily became addicted to opioids, while rats in good conditions largely resisted, no matter how much they were given. Indigenous women in Canada, he says, have six times the rate of rheumatoid arthritis.

• His shopping addiction and his wife's rebuke

Maté would spend $3,000 in a classical music store, then return two hours later for more. The addiction was to the shopping, not the music. Five years ago, while touring for When the Body Says No, he was irritable and overworked. His wife, Rae, said

he'd better write one called "When the Wife Says No."

- **Women who said no**

  At a recent workshop, two women told him that reading When the Body Says No and starting to say no had "cured" their MS. He offers this as one of many anecdotes, not a trial result. He also points out that doctors treat many autoimmune flares with cortisol, a stress hormone, yet rarely ask whether chronic stress is involved.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Validate the need behind the habit**

  Mel's scrolling turned out to be about lacking joy and rest and being uncomfortable alone with herself. Ask what need the behaviour serves, accept that the need is valid, then look for less harmful ways to meet it. "Don't drink" alone doesn't address the underlying need.

- **The weekly six-question exercise**

  Where do I struggle to say no? What does that cost me? What belief stops me? Where did I learn it, often at two to five years old? Who would I be without it? And sixth: where am I not saying yes, to play, rest, creativity and joy?

- **Treat healing as a social process**

  He values 12-step groups for compassionate, shame-free sharing but wants more awareness of trauma there, noting that founder Bill W. was an abandoned child. Low-cost tools include free talks, library books, meditation, time in nature, exercise and better food.

Change Your Brain: #1 Neuroscientist’s Exercise Protocol for Peak Energy and Focus

Guest: Dr. Wendy Suzuki
Date: 2024-10-03 · Duration: 1:04:03
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izWRm4-52l4

KEYPOINTS

• Your brain can change in both directions throughout adult life

Neuroscientist Dr. Wendy Suzuki, dean of NYU's College of Arts and Science, defines brain plasticity as the brain's ability to change and grow in response to its environment. Positive plasticity means more connections between existing neurons and, in the hippocampus, brand-new cells. Negative plasticity means shrinkage and lost function, and she names chronic stress and chronic anxiety as the most common drivers. Her goal for every student is a "big fat fluffy brain" with constant positive plasticity.

• The hippocampus can grow new cells in adulthood

The hippocampus, critical for forming and keeping long-term memories, is one of only two areas of the human brain where new cells are born in adulthood. Everyone grows some, but physical activity increases how many are born. Suzuki describes these new cells as "teenage" cells: hyperactive and eager to join memory circuits, which makes the whole hippocampus work better.

• Every bout of movement releases a neurochemical "bubble bath"

Each time you move, Suzuki says, your brain gets a flood of dopamine, serotonin, noradrenaline, endorphins and growth factors. The first three lift mood; the growth factors travel to the hippocampus and drive new cell growth. The key takeaway she repeats: the flood starts with a 10-minute walk. Getting your heart rate up does more, but you do not need a marathon to start.

• Movement uses the same chemistry as common mood medications

Suzuki notes that the most commonly prescribed drugs for depression and anxiety work through noradrenaline, dopamine and serotonin, the same chemicals movement releases. That is why a short walk can ease anxiety. Mel adds that medications save lives and are an important tool, and the point is not to shame anyone but to remember the one your body makes for free.

• Focus is the most reliably reported brain benefit of exercise

Improved focus is the easiest effect to find in studies, linked to the prefrontal cortex. The exact mechanism is less clear than for the hippocampus; researchers think growth factors build new synapses rather than new cells there. You get an immediate focus bump from a 10-minute walk, and with regular long-term exercise your baseline focus and attention rise.

• Exercise feeds its own motivation

One of Suzuki's favorite findings: people assigned to exercise conditions became more motivated to exercise. She attributes the energy boost Mel feels after workouts most likely to the same dopamine and serotonin surge, since reward and good mood feel energizing.

• Aerobic activity is the key for memory

Growth factors for hippocampal growth come from muscle movement and from ketones released by the liver, so you need enough movement to raise your heart rate: dancing and power walking count. The benefit is to forming new long-term memories for facts and events, and to spatial memory, such as finding your way to the subway or learning a new route.

• Exercise stocks up the brain areas most vulnerable to aging

The prefrontal cortex and hippocampus are the regions most susceptible to aging and neurodegenerative disease. Regular aerobic exercise makes them as robust as possible. Suzuki is careful: it does not cure aging or dementia, it helps stave them off. Her own research is mostly in younger people because the longer you move, the better off your brain is later.

• It is never too late to start

Suzuki points to people with mild cognitive impairment who show improvement once put on an exercise program. For anyone who has not moved in decades, start with what you already do: walk more, park farther away, take the stairs, walk with a friend or pet, or walk around a museum you love.

• Social connection matters most for longevity

On living longer, Suzuki defers to Harvard's Robert Waldinger, whose research points to social connection as the number one factor, with heart-rate-raising activity also lowering cardiovascular risk. Her advice is to stack the effects: walk with a friend.

EXAMPLES

• Marian Diamond and the "Disney World of rat cages"

On her first day at UC Berkeley, Suzuki watched professor Marian Diamond, the first woman to earn a neuroanatomy PhD there, pull a preserved human brain from a hat box. In the 1960s Diamond showed that rats' cortex grew in an enriched cage versus a "shoebox" one, overturning the dogma that adult brains could not change. Later work found the running wheel produced most of those gains.

• The tenure years and the Peru rafting trip

Chasing tenure at NYU, Suzuki worked nonstop, had few friends, ate takeout and felt lethargic. On a solo rafting trip in Peru she was the weakest person aboard, so she started going to the gym. About a year and a half later, while writing a grant, she noticed her focus and memory were better, and wondered whether exercise was why.

• Teaching "Can Exercise Change Your Brain?"

When her administrator refused to fund an exercise instructor, Suzuki got certified herself in intensati, Patricia Moreno's mix of kickboxing, dance, yoga and martial arts, training for six months. Her class sweated for an hour, then discussed research, with tests at the start and end. A colleague's elective served as the control group.

• Her lab's dose studies

Low-fit adults (under 20 minutes of exercise a week) did 45-minute spin classes three times a week for three months, compared with a non-aerobic "power Scrabble" group. Spin improved mood, focus and some hippocampal functions. In a study

of already-active people, those who increased up to seven sessions a week got more brain changes — "every turn of the bike wheel counts."

• Betty the brain

Suzuki brought a real preserved human brain, "Betty," in her department for over 26 years. Mel held it, about three pounds, and learned that the visual cortex sits at the back of the head (why a knock there makes you see stars) and that unfolded, the cortex would cover a dining table.

• Her father's dementia and the first "I love you"

Her father got lost driving eight blocks home from 7-Eleven, a spatial-memory sign she knew pointed to the hippocampus; he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's dementia. In her Japanese American family nobody said "I love you," so she asked her parents on a Sunday call whether they could start. A week later her father, who remembered little, said it first. She explains that emotional resonance helps hippocampal memories stick.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Take a 10-minute walk as your baseline dose

Use it before a big task or when anxious to start the neurochemical flood, then build toward heart-rate-raising activity you actually enjoy.

• Aim for 45 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week

That is the regimen that showed mood, focus and memory effects in three months in Suzuki's lab, and more sessions brought more change.

• End your shower cold for an adrenaline boost

Suzuki finishes hot showers on full cold and says the boost lasts much of the morning. Start with a shoulder and get out once you've felt the shock. Mel's habit: rinse your conditioner out in cold water, about 20 seconds.

• Exercise on the mornings you need to perform

Mel got up at 5:35 to work out before this recording because she knows a morning session starts you in a better mood with sharper focus.

Brain Hacks: 6 Secrets to Learn Faster & Unlock The Full Power Of Your Mind

Guest: Jim Kwik, Dr. Daniel Amen, Dr. Sarah Wakeman, Dr. Joseph Ferrari, Dr. Paul Conti, Shawn Achor
Date: 2024-06-27 · Duration: 0:49:51
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6JBor1xyQQ

KEYPOINTS

• Most of your brain's performance is within your control

Brain coach Jim Kwik, once called 'the boy with the broken brain' after hitting his head on a classroom radiator, says about a third of brain performance, such as memory, is set by genetics and biology. The other two-thirds is in your hands. In 32 years of coaching, he says, age, education, IQ and history haven't stopped anyone from improving.

• Use SUAVE to remember names

Say the name immediately (you hear it twice, and any mistake gets corrected early, so you don't spend 20 minutes talking to Ted and say goodbye to 'Ed'). Use it three or four times. Ask about it: spelling, origin, who they were named after. Visualise it, since the visual cortex takes up more of the brain: Mary carrying two lambs, David with a slingshot, Mike singing on a table. End by saying goodbye with their name.

• Point your brain toward the positive at both ends of the day

Psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Amen, whose Amen Clinics have done nearly 200,000 brain scans across 111 countries (including Mel's and Chris's), starts each day with 'today is going to be a great day' and asks his family at breakfast why it will be. At night he prays, then goes on a 'treasure hunt' for what went well, starting from the moment he woke. He has done it for seven or eight years, including the night his father died. 'The brain is lazy; it does what you nudge it to do.'

• Amen's five brain foods

Wild salmon for omega-3s, organic berries (he calls blueberries 'brain berries' and says blueberry extract has been shown to improve memory), nuts and seeds (linked to lower rates of depression and dementia), leafy greens for fiber and magnesium, and raw cacao. His rule: only eat things you love that love you back. He says beer, for instance, shrinks your brain.

• Heavy drinking damages memory and can shrink the brain

Dr. Sarah Wakeman, senior medical director for substance use disorder at Mass General Brigham and an associate professor at Harvard Medical School, explains that alcohol affects regions involved in laying down memories. Long-term heavy use can cause dementia, and a rare alcohol-related amnesia leaves people unable to form new memories. Scans of long-term heavy drinkers in their 50s often show volume loss resembling a much older brain.

• Cutting back brings quick benefits

Wakeman lists better, more restorative sleep, possible weight loss from fewer liquid calories, more energy to exercise without hangovers, less irritability and more presence with loved ones, and over time better skin, hydration and hormone regulation, with less acne. Seeing these early, she says, can reinforce longer-term decisions.

• Procrastination is learned, so it can be unlearned

DePaul psychologist Professor Ferrari says about 20% of adults are chronic procrastinators, with no significant gender difference, which he says is more common than depression or panic attacks. Everyone procrastinates sometimes; procrastinators do it across life, from RSVPs to bills. He says culture reinforces it by punishing lateness without rewarding earliness, and fear drives it, because people would rather be judged as lacking effort than lacking ability.

• Procrastinators see the forest and miss the trees

Ferrari's fix is to cut down one tree. If that's too much, three branches; if that's too much, a handful of leaves. A body in motion stays in motion. Mel adds examples: do arm exercises today instead of fixating on losing 30 pounds; ask your boss what it would take to grow; research one city you'd like to live in.

• Get curious about your self-talk rather than arguing with it

Psychiatrist Dr. Paul Conti, trained at Stanford and Harvard and credited by Lady Gaga with changing her life, says inner talk either 'paints with a broad brush' ('you're a loser') or targets what you want most ('you'll never find anyone'). Imagine someone whispering that in your ear all day. Recognise it, ask what you say when you drop something or face something new, and get it out of your head by journaling or telling a trusted person or therapist.

• Expect months, not days

Conti tells patients that real change in self-talk usually takes about four to six months, with some improvement possibly within a couple of weeks. Expecting a quick fix from a pill or a few sessions sets people up to quit.

EXAMPLES

• Amen's daily brain-healthy hot chocolate

About 12 ounces of unsweetened organic almond milk, heated, with a heaping teaspoon of raw cacao and a couple of droppers of liquid chocolate stevia, blended. He calls it part of his ritual for happiness.

• "To hell with it" means "to hell with me"

Conti describes small self-punishments, like walking in the rain rather than opening an umbrella. Mel admits doing exactly that, collar popped and hunched. Conti's reframe: put the umbrella up as a small act of protection, and do small kindnesses like picking up something a stranger dropped in a coffee line.

• Oakley's teeth

Mel's son barely brushed in elementary school until his sisters teased him about yellow teeth. A couple of months of daily brushing transformed them, which Mel uses as a parallel for cleaning up self-talk.

• Shawn Achor's 21-day happiness habits

The author of The Happiness Advantage asks people to write three new gratitudes daily without repeats for 21 days and to take 15-minute brisk walks four to five times a week, which he says research equates to an antidepressant over six months with a 30% lower relapse rate. He also recommends two minutes of watching your breath (he says accuracy improves 10% after 21 days) and a two-minute thank-you or praise email to a different person each day, which he says improves social connection, the

top predictor of long-term happiness.

- **The pitcher next to the glass**
  Achor says we argue about whether the glass is half full or half empty while ignoring the pitcher of water beside it that we could use to refill it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Pair a positive question with brushing your teeth**
  Mel suggests asking 'what went well today?' while you brush at night, so the habit rides on one you already have.
- **Pick one tree today**
  Choose a single concrete action toward whatever you've been putting off, then stop thinking about the whole forest.
- **Commit to 21 days**
  Achor's habits are designed around a three-week run, so track them for 21 days before judging the results.

#1 Researcher: 7 Signs You May Have High Functioning Depression

Guest: Dr. Judith Joseph
Date: 2024-05-02 · Duration: 0:49:21
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQu-Ct9-6dg

KEYPOINTS

• Many people with depression don't fit the standard checklist

Psychiatrist and researcher Dr. Judith Joseph says that under the DSM-5, someone with many symptoms of depression but no loss of functioning or obvious distress is often told to come back when things get worse. She calls that model 'broken'. It misses people before they reach crisis, turn to unhealthy coping, or break down physically. The term 'high-functioning depression' has been around for about five years; she didn't coin it, but she is researching it.

• High-functioning depression can look like being 'the rock'

These are people who care for their families, meet deadlines and collect praise, the ones others call the rock of the family. Yet they feel something is missing and don't feel much joy. Joseph says some never had words for sadness because of their culture, and others push through because trauma taught them not to feel.

• The 'joy thief' is anhedonia

Joseph calls anhedonia, a reduced ability to feel pleasure, a sneaky symptom that strongly correlates with depression, especially the high-functioning kind. It 'steals your joy in the middle of the night' until nothing excites you and everything feels 'meh'. Many people don't recognise it as depression because they picture someone crying in bed all day.

• Depression can look very different from person to person

Joseph's research looks at the different faces of depression. Men may show it as irritability, anger, checking out or 'knocking back a couple of beers'. Others stay constantly busy because that's the only way they know, such as children of immigrants raised with 'work, deliver and you'll be okay', or mothers who feel they have no choice.

• Depression and anxiety often go together

Mel would have labelled her bolt-out-of-bed, multitasking, wine-at-night days as anxiety. Joseph explains that restlessness is also a symptom of major depression, and many researchers see the two as different sides of the same coin. That's why treatments like SSRIs and cognitive behavioural therapy overlap. Anxiety tends to come with more physical symptoms and excessive worry.

• There are many possible contributors, and inflammation is getting more attention

Joseph stresses that these are correlations, not proven causes. Dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine patterns may differ in depressed brains. Twin studies point to genetic predisposition. Recent data links inflammation to depression, and with some estimates that 70–75% of people have had COVID-19, she says we don't yet know how that has affected brains. Back-to-back collective trauma and constant social media add to the picture.

• At work, it can look like control and a lost identity

People with high-functioning depression may believe nobody else can do the job right, tie their identity to their role, and have dropped hobbies like photography or art. Sleep isn't refreshing, appetite swings, concentration and energy dip, and they may over-deliver while denying distress. Joseph suggests some clinicians miss it because the patient looks like them.

• Scarcity trauma can be passed down

Joseph describes scarcity trauma: a history of going without, sometimes generations back through refugees, war survivors or farmers, that drives behaviour that doesn't make sense today. Examples include clothes left in the closet with tags on, hoarded expired food, being unable to throw things out, or overspending when money finally arrives. Emotional scarcity, growing up in a cold family focused on survival, works the same way.

• Naming a feeling helps take its power away

Joseph calls it affect labeling: naming what you feel calms the body, like turning on a light and seeing the noise was just a book falling. It isn't about diagnosing yourself; it's about bringing the problem out of your subconscious so you can see it separately from you. She says we teach children feelings charts but forget that adults need this too.

• Depression isn't a competition

Joseph gets pushback for the phrase 'high-functioning', but argues you should use the language people identify with, because 'you're not depressed enough' is invalidating. Mel agrees: getting through the day doesn't mean you feel better than someone who can't get out of bed.

EXAMPLES

• Chris Robbins' hidden depression

Mel's husband was sober, meditated daily, exercised, was close to their kids and ran a men's retreat, yet 'the light was off behind his eyes' for years. He thought it was midlife or falling testosterone. Mel says a brain scan by a doctor previously on the show found treatment-resistant depression (dysthymia), and the doctor said he usually saw brains like that after people had died. Chris resisted the label, believing it meant he was weak.

• A 'day in the life' from Joseph's TikTok

Waking before the alarm, full of angst; gulping coffee instead of eating; working through lunch; coming home too burnt out for family; doom-scrolling instead of playing with the kids. 'You're killing it at work, you're not letting anyone down, but you're letting yourself down.'

• Mel's opening quiz

Do you drink coffee instead of breakfast and eat lunch at your desk? Feel dread when the alarm goes off? Scroll mindlessly at night when you don't want to? Feel you can't take a day off? Tell yourself it's easier to do it yourself than ask for help? Mel says Joseph considers each of these a possible sign of high-functioning depression.

• Grandma's dim fridge

Mel's farming grandmother's fridge was always dimly lit and full of old food, because on a farm nothing was wasted. Through

therapy, Mel saw she had absorbed the idea that being wasteful made her a bad person. Now she keeps her fridge nearly empty with bright bulbs, and she notes that doing things differently can feel like defying your whole family line.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Don't treat yourself as a burden**

  Joseph's top 'never': don't believe you're a burden. With patients, she scrolls through phone photos from 'high-functioning AF' times and asks whether those friends would really have minded hearing them out. Challenge the belief that you're only lovable when you're perfect.

- **Acknowledge the 'little traumas' too**

  Standard trauma questionnaires miss things like being teased as a child for seeming gay, or arriving in a new country hungry with nothing. Recognising these helps explain how you see yourself.

- **Gradually challenge scarcity habits**

  Cross-examine the thought 'I'm wasteful' like a lawyer: where's the evidence? Throw out one expired can or give one item to charity, and notice how it feels. This gradual approach is a form of exposure therapy within CBT.

- **Check your symptoms and talk to a doctor**

  Joseph says her website has self-assessment scales for anhedonia and high-functioning depression. She encourages talking to your doctor even if therapy doesn't appeal to you. She is also researching mental health links to menopause, including brain fog and sleep problems.

The Truth About ADHD in Adults: Harvard’s Dr. Chris Palmer Explains the Research

Guest: Dr. Chris Palmer
Date: 2024-01-25 · Duration: 1:06:51
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XM5qZXqTQ3s

KEYPOINTS

• How ADHD is diagnosed
Dr. Palmer, a psychiatrist who has spent almost 30 years at Harvard's McLean Hospital, explains that symptoms must begin before age 12, even if nobody noticed them then, and must last at least six months. They fall into two groups: inattention, and hyperactivity or impulsivity.

• Girls are more often missed
Hyperactive, impulsive kids, more often boys, are obvious: blurting out answers, fidgeting, treated as discipline problems, so they get diagnosed. The primarily inattentive type, which tends to be more common in girls, shows up as trouble focusing on tests or remembering what was just read. These kids have to work harder and are often wrongly seen as 'not so bright.'

• It's a disorder on paper, but can also be an adaptive trait
ADHD is listed in the DSM-5, but Palmer says it can also be seen as neurodiversity. Explorers, innovators and energetic, motivated people are essential to a tribe's survival. The problem comes when you put them in a classroom and ask them to sit still and read for five hours.

• Underactive 'conductor' regions in the brain
Regions for focus and concentration, especially the frontal lobes and the striatum, tend to be underactive. There's no brain scan that can diagnose ADHD, and presentations vary widely. Palmer says the over- and underactivity seen on scans is really about brain metabolism: blood flow that brings food and oxygen so cells can make energy.

• Comorbidity is the norm
About 50% of Americans with one DSM diagnosis have more than one, and people who seek treatment average three to four. ADHD often comes with dyslexia, anxiety, depression or bipolar disorder. Among autistic people, about 50% have ADHD and many have seizures, depression or anxiety.

• Stimulants are a metabolic intervention
Medications like Adderall and Concerta raise dopamine, which boosts metabolism in the underactive conductor regions. Palmer isn't against them: if a stimulant works for you, keep taking it. But understanding them this way opens other options, which matters because some people crash in the evening, sleep poorly or lose their appetite, and all of that further disrupts brain metabolism.

• Try lifestyle changes before or alongside medication
Therapy, behavioural interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy and medication all stay on the table. Before reaching for pills, Palmer would do a common-sense check: is the person eating mostly processed food, getting enough vitamins, minerals and protein, sleeping, and how much screen time are they getting? Mel notes she's never had a clinician ask first what she eats or how much she exercises.

• A two-week elimination diet to test for food sensitivities
Palmer points to growing research on the two-way gut-brain connection. For example, gluten in a sensitive person can inflame the gut and affect the brain, which may show up as ADHD symptoms, anxiety or low mood. Cut common culprits like gluten, dairy, soy, sugar and artificial dyes and sweeteners (a Whole30-style plan covers many) for about two weeks. If you improve dramatically, add foods back one at a time to find the least restrictive diet that works.

• Or simply eat more protein, fewer carbs and more whole food for a month
Mel's summary: 'chicken cutlets, not chicken nuggets.' Give it at least a month, and if it makes no difference, stop. Palmer says he isn't asking for sacrifices with no clear return.

• Build muscle, do zone 2 cardio, cut substances
More muscle means better metabolic health, and a little tone goes a long way. Zone 2 is 30 to 60 minutes at a pace where you can still talk: hiking, cycling, swimming. Reduce alcohol, marijuana, smoking and vaping. Palmer also flags psychiatric drugs that cause weight gain as potentially working against you long term.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's diagnosis at 47
Mel learned she had ADHD, dyslexia and dysgraphia at 47, after her son Oakley was assessed in fourth grade, labelled a problem kid who, it turned out, couldn't read. She had been treated for anxiety for 25 years and now wonders whether the inability to focus was the core issue.

• Oakley and medication
Oakley was an extremely picky eater who lived on chicken nuggets and played lots of video games. On Vyvanse he 'turned into the Hulk.' On Adderall he dropped off a cliff at the end of the day, and Mel saw 'the light going out' in her 12-year-old. He refused to keep taking medication. He hasn't taken any since 13, and after changing his diet and becoming more active, Mel says it's as if his whole brain changed.

• Exercise works like Adderall for Mel
After an intense workout, Mel can hyperfocus for about 90 minutes. She also skipped her medication on the morning of the interview because studio adrenaline keeps her focused. Palmer notes both stimulants and exercise act on brain metabolism.

• 'Don't medicate away your success'
When Palmer asked whether she really wanted to change, Mel admitted she sometimes uses ADHD as an excuse. Palmer said the traits teachers scolded may be what fuelled her success, and he'd hate to see someone 'medicate away' those

strengths. Medication and lifestyle work are for when symptoms clearly interfere with life.

- **One lifestyle plan, many conditions**

  For a patient with obesity, type 2 diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), fatty liver, depression and ADHD, Palmer says a single plan covering diet, exercise, sleep, stress and quitting smoking can address them all. He insists her brain improving is biological, not 'just psychological.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Tell kids the problem isn't them**

  Palmer says children told they're troublemakers internalise being 'the problem.' A better message: 'Your brain metabolism isn't working right, it's not your fault, and we can address this.'

- **Limits of the approach**

  Palmer says diet won't cure all ADHD, and core differences in social skills on the autism spectrum likely won't change, though other symptoms might, especially with early intervention. People with complex conditions such as chronic infection may need more sophisticated treatment.

- **Talk to your doctor first**

  Both Mel and Palmer stress that you should consult a doctor before changing diet, medication or exercise, especially for a child.

- **Use a dry month as an experiment**

  If cutting alcohol for a month leaves you sleeping better and more focused, Palmer sees that as metabolism at work, and as evidence worth acting on.

Reset Your Mental Health: The Diet & Nutrition Protocol From a Renowned Harvard MD

Guest: Dr. Chris Palmer
Date: 2024-01-22 · Duration: 1:29:51
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xg5-HF4ehU

KEYPOINTS

• Mental health treatments work, but fail far too many people

Dr. Chris Palmer, a Harvard Medical School psychiatrist who has spent almost 30 years at McLean Hospital, is careful to say that current treatments save millions of lives. His concern is the people who take their medication year after year without getting better. He argues that research from the last 20 years undercuts the message that serious mental illness is a lifelong sentence that can only be managed.

• Brain energy theory: mental disorders are metabolic disorders of the brain

Neurotransmitters, hormones, genetics, stress, trauma, loneliness and addiction all play a role in mental illness, but he says no one had tied them together. His claim is that people with brain disorders have a metabolic problem affecting the brain, which is why their brains either do something they shouldn't or fail to do something they should. Mel and Palmer both acknowledge that many in the field consider the theory controversial.

• Metabolism is more than burning calories

He defines metabolism as turning food, oxygen and nutrients into energy and building blocks for cells. It shapes how every cell develops and functions, and whether it lives or dies. His analogy is city traffic: many factors matter, but the drivers determine whether it flows. In metabolism, the 'drivers' are the mitochondria.

• Mitochondria respond to lifestyle and to stress

Mitochondria help regulate neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine and switch inflammation on and off. They are affected by diet, exercise, sleep, hormones and substances such as cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, and also by psychological and social stressors. That's why he believes lifestyle can reach the root of the problem.

• Mental illness carries a heavy physical cost

Across all psychiatric diagnoses combined, he says men lose about 10 years of life and women about seven, roughly 15% of their lifespan. Heart attacks are the leading cause of death, and dementia risk is higher too. He argues the mental health field has wrongly treated these conditions as 'not our problem.'

• Rising metabolic disease and rising mental illness aren't a coincidence

He cites about 50% of US adults having prediabetes or diabetes, alongside 1 in 5 Americans having a mental illness in a given year and 1 in 2 over a lifetime. He calls the brain an organ like the heart. Whatever you blame, whether diet, inactivity, social media or environmental toxins, those factors hit the brain at the same time they affect weight and blood sugar.

• The ketogenic diet is a medical therapy, not just a fad

He notes it was developed over 100 years ago by a physician to stop seizures. He says randomized trials and meta-analyses now support it for treatment-resistant epilepsy, sometimes working where drugs and even brain surgery failed. He says it changes neurotransmitters and gene expression, lowers inflammation and improves mitochondrial function. Epilepsy patients often need it for only two to five years.

• Keto isn't required for everyone

Some people do 'spectacularly well' just by cutting junk food, processed foods or added sugar, or by eating Paleo, Whole30, or a vegetarian or vegan whole-food diet. For mental health, keto is usually not lifelong. People often stay on it for one to five years and may then add back complex carbohydrates like whole grains or potatoes.

• Expect keto flu, then look for an antidepressant effect

A well-formulated version may need extra sodium, potassium and magnesium. The first week or two can be rough, with weakness, hunger, irritability and dizziness, while the body shifts toward burning fat. After that, many people notice they feel lighter and have more energy, clearer thinking and easier mornings. Weightlifters may see a strength dip for about two months before it returns.

• Never make these changes, especially to medication, on your own

Both Mel and Palmer repeat that any diet or lifestyle change should be made with your own doctor. Tapering medication is a 'rocky road' where things can get worse before they improve. He also allows that some people have rare genetic conditions, hormone imbalances or chronic infections that lifestyle alone won't fix.

EXAMPLES

• A childhood of OCD and his mother's psychosis

He had undiagnosed OCD as a child and was bullied, at one point covering his mouth because he believed the air was contaminated. When he was 12, his mother developed psychotic depression and lost custody of all eight children, her money and the family pharmacy. He moved in with her and started high school while living in a homeless shelter. Her medications left her looking drugged and still ill, and he says he assumed he would be dead before 20.

• Professors told him psychiatry would waste his talent

He was a top medical student. At least two professors told him psychiatry just 'throws pills at people that don't really work.' That infuriated him and helped push him into the field.

• His own metabolic syndrome, reversed in three months

In his 20s at McLean, he had high blood pressure, prediabetes and bad lipids despite eating under 5–10 grams of fat a day and exercising. Facing three daily pills, he skeptically tried Atkins. Within three months his metabolic syndrome was gone, and his mood, energy, sleep and concentration were the best of his life.

• The schizoaffective patient who lost 160 pounds

An eight-year patient with daily hallucinations and paranoid delusions had tried 17 medications, gained over 100 pounds and weighed 340. He tried keto to lose weight. Within two weeks he was smiling and talking more. At about two months the voices began fading, and he concluded the conspiracy wasn't real. His father and psychologist confirmed the change. Nearly seven years later he has kept off 160 pounds, moved out, earned a certificate, performed improv and teaches karate. Palmer stresses he is not cured and still takes reduced medication.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **His starting plan for mild-to-moderate cases**

  He offers it only for people who aren't in danger, suicidal or psychotic. First, try a ketogenic diet for three months. A typical day might be eggs with extra butter and bacon, then protein like steak, chicken or salmon with low-carb vegetables dressed in olive oil, plus nuts and avocado.

- **Move a bit more, by any route**

  If you're doing nothing, one weekly resistance session hitting the major muscle groups to failure is 'more than enough.' So is a 10-minute walk after dinner, away from screens.

- **Sleep until getting up isn't torture**

  Aim for at least seven to eight hours. If you're hitting snooze and dragging yourself out of bed, go to bed earlier.

- **Ninety days off alcohol, weed and nicotine**

  He compares it to an athlete in training: no alcohol, marijuana, CBD, smoking or vaping for three months. For people who can't do it all at once, he starts with diet, because early mood gains give them the energy to add the rest. Some patients later joke that he 'tricked' them, because they feel too good to go back.

Super Brain: 10 Things to Eat, Think, & Do to Improve Your Memory and Learn Faster

Guest: Jim Kwik
Date: 2023-12-14 · Duration: 1:02:10
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25P_j48IYaA

KEYPOINTS

• About two-thirds of your brain's performance is within your influence

Brain coach Jim Kwik says roughly one-third of memory and brain performance is set by genetics and biology, leaving two-thirds in your direct control. After 32 years of daily coaching, he says people of any age, IQ, education or background can improve. His point is that 'genius is built, not born.'

• Learning how to learn is the 'lead domino'

Kwik says school teaches what to learn but never how. There are classes on math, history and Spanish, but none on focus, memory or reading speed. Telling a child to 'focus' or 'memorize this' is like telling someone who never had a lesson to play the ukulele. Most of us also stopped upgrading our reading skills at age six or seven, even though reading demands have exploded, and he says that gap creates information anxiety.

• A visual pacer can speed up your reading by 25–50%

Run a finger, pen or highlighter just above the line as you read. Kwik gives three reasons it works: it stops 'back-skipping' (rereading words and lines), your eyes are wired to follow motion, and sight and touch are closely linked, much as smell and taste are. He says some people even double their speed. With the average person processing information about four hours a day, saving one hour daily adds up to 365 hours a year, or more than nine 40-hour work weeks.

• Remembering names starts with MOM: motivation, observation, methods

Motivation: before meeting someone, ask why you want to remember them. Kwik's test is that if a suitcase of a million dollars rode on remembering the next stranger's name, everyone would. Observation: most people don't forget names, they never hear them, because they're looking around or planning their reply. He notes the letters of 'listen' spell 'silent.'

• The SUAVE method for names

Say the name right back, so you hear it twice and get corrected early (better than calling Ted 'Ed' after 20 minutes). Use it a few times in conversation. Ask about it: how it's spelled, where it's from, who they were named after. Visualize it, because we remember faces better than names; for example, picture Mary with two lambs, David with a slingshot or Mike singing on a table into a microphone. End by saying goodbye using the name.

• Find lost keys by encoding the moment with a vivid image

Memory works by encoding, storing and retrieving. Most 'forgetting' is a failure to encode. You don't need to repeat 'my keys are here' 15 times. Take a split second to make it extraordinary, such as imagining the desk exploding as you drop the keys. The same see-it, feel-it, hear-it approach is how he says eight-year-olds memorize the periodic table.

• The 3M framework: mindset, motivation, methods

Kwik defines mindset as your assumptions about something, and says 'if you fight for your limitations, you get to keep them.' Your self-talk is a program your brain runs, so he suggests adding 'yet,' as in 'I don't have a great memory yet.' For motivation, he asks himself about 10 times a day: 'What is the tiniest action I could take right now that will give me progress toward this goal, where I can't fail?'

• Ten keys for a limitless brain

Kwik's list: a good brain diet, killing ANTs (automatic negative thoughts), exercise, brain nutrients, a positive peer group, a clean environment, sleep, brain protection, new learning and stress management. On peers he cites mirror neurons and says whether someone smokes has more to do with their social network than their biology. On stress, he says chronic stress has been shown to shrink the brain and keeps you in survival mode.

• His favorite brain foods and supplements

Kwik lists avocados, blueberries ('brain berries'), broccoli, olive oil and a Mediterranean diet, and eggs, whose choline is a precursor to acetylcholine. He adds leafy greens, fatty fish for omega-3 DHA, turmeric for curcumin, walnuts and almonds for vitamin E, and dark chocolate. For nutrients he mentions DHA if you don't eat fish, plus ginkgo, lion's mane and creatine. These are his recommendations, not a medical protocol.

EXAMPLES

• 200 names in reverse

Mel first saw Kwik speak to several thousand people at a big consulting firm. He had a couple hundred people wearing red stand and say their names, then repeated them all in reverse. Mel, skeptical and watching from backstage, confirmed he had nothing in his ears and wrote nothing down.

• 'The boy with the broken brain'

At five, in 1978, Kwik fell head-first into a radiator while standing on a chair to see sirens outside. He struggled with focus and memory afterward. At nine a teacher defended him by saying 'leave that kid alone, that's the boy with the broken brain,' and it became his inner voice. His takeaway: adults' external words become a child's internal words.

• The mentor and the dream list

Ready to quit college, Kwik visited a friend's family. The father asked him why he was in school, had him write two pages of dreams, then held his fingers apart and said 'you are this close.' He handed Kwik books and asked him to read one a week. About 60 days into studying how the brain learns, Kwik says 'a light switch flipped.'

• Bill Clinton's memory at a fundraiser

At a 2,000-person event, Clinton greeted Kwik by name and picked up a conversation from three years earlier. He told Kwik that his grandfather in Arkansas used to quiz the kids on stories to see if they were listening. Kwik concluded that 'incredible memory and powerful presence come from being powerfully present.'

• Counting to five in Japanese

Kwik teaches Mel 1–6 using images: scratch your knee and say 'itchy knee' (ichi, ni), point up at the sun (san), point to a woman (shi), say 'go go go' (go), and row a canoe (roku).

OTHER RELEVANT

• Test the pacer on yourself in two minutes

Read for 60 seconds normally and count the lines. Then read for another 60 seconds while underlining with a pen tip and compare the counts.

• Memorize any list with the memory palace

Kwik walks Mel through a 2,500-year-old technique. He places each of the ten keys along a route to his office: a brain-food buffet in the parking lot, stomping ANTs on the bridge, exercising in the elevator, a helmet to headbutt the classroom door, and relaxing on the bonsai trees. Mel recalls all ten in order. He uses this method with Hollywood actors and TED speakers for speeches and toasts.

• Catch and edit your brain stories

Mel names her own: ADHD, menopause brain fog, 'I'm bad with names,' and dyslexia. After six years of high-school French she placed into French 101. Kwik's point is that arguing for these beliefs keeps you from using the methods.

You Can Make a Difference: Remarkable Story To Inspire You to Do Something Big | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Lorenzo Lewis
Date: 2023-10-02 · Duration: 1:17:31
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=797GbDqRrYQ

KEYPOINTS

• Lorenzo Lewis turned barbers and stylists into mental health advocates
His nonprofit, the Confess Project, has trained over 3,000 barbers and stylists across 52 cities in 35 states, reaching more than 3 million people a year; Mel cites roughly a million people reached for every thousand trained. Lewis isn't a therapist or doctor, and nobody asked him to do this. Mel's point: he saw a problem and answered the call.

• The gap he's addressing: access and trust
Mel cites that only about 4% of therapists and licensed mental health professionals are Black, that 47% of people still see seeking therapy as weakness, and that 60% don't fully trust the person they get help from. Lewis says it's hard to open up to someone who doesn't share or understand your lived experience, and historical distrust of medical providers and authority adds another barrier.

• He was born to an incarcerated mother and lost his father at 10
Lewis was born while his mother was in jail; his father died in prison when he was 10. To keep him out of foster care, his aunt and uncle drove from Little Rock, Arkansas, to Newark, New Jersey, to take him in. He had a good upbringing in many ways, but felt lost, angry and unseen, wondering whether his parents loved him or whether their absence was his fault.

• Unrecognized grief can look like 'bad behavior'
After his father died, Lewis was kicked out of school in about third grade and spent around two months in a behavioral health facility at 10, coming home on weekends. Returning to school, he felt ashamed and tried to make it sound cool. Mel says it makes her angry when struggling kids are disciplined instead of having mental health or learning differences addressed, and notes men often shove sadness down until it erupts as anger.

• 'A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down'
Lewis quotes the African proverb to explain how, at 17, he joined a gang and was arrested on a firearm charge. He frames it as lashing out at himself because he didn't feel loved or seen, not simply bad choices.

• A juvenile detention cell became his turning point
The weekend before court, a month shy of 18, he kept thinking this was the same place he was born and where his father had been. Thanks largely to his aunt pleading with the court and his clean record, the judge gave him a second chance. He promised her she'd never see him in the system again and that he would go to college. He kept his word, earning a human services degree from Arkansas Baptist College.

• Barbershops and salons are community hubs
Lewis grew up doing homework and eating dinner in his aunt's beauty shop, later built behind their house, and found his first mentor, Sylvester, the only male barber among five operators. He says Black barbershops were tied to civil rights organizing, are among the few routes to generational wealth, and, outside church, are rare places where homeless neighbors, principals and entrepreneurs gather together.

• The idea came from hospital work and empty men's events
Working on an inpatient mental health unit in Arkansas, Lewis saw patients from all walks of life cycling back, saying treatment felt pointless and not feeling honored or included. His first event, a back-to-school mental health event at a Black church in Little Rock, drew about 700 people. But men wouldn't come to library sessions; only the women who wanted their men to get help showed up.

• Manhood norms make vulnerability hard
Lewis says ideas of manhood, growing up without fathers at home, and media and hip-hop images make it hard for men, especially Black men, to be vulnerable. He credits figures like Charlamagne tha God for championing mental health. His view: model vulnerability by being transparent that you're still learning, too.

• The four-part training formula
Barbers learn active listening, validation, positive communication and stigma reduction, drawn from therapeutic practice but used as advocacy while cutting hair. Instead of 'don't worry about it' or 'just pray,' they might say: 'I noticed your day's been hard. What's going on? How can I support you?' Each shop also gets a resource directory for housing, health care sign-up, jobs and bill pay.

EXAMPLES

• The 'last haircut' in Johnson City
Two weeks after a training in Johnson City, Tennessee, where local therapists attended, a client told his barber he didn't want to be here anymore. The barber knew how to respond and connect him to help. By contrast, in South Philadelphia, before training, a man said he'd walk into traffic, then went missing during a psychotic episode; barbers didn't know what to do. He was found. Mel notes police often aren't trusted in many communities, and aren't the right responders.

• The Harvard study
Thirty-two barbers across eight states took part in a Harvard Medical School study lasting eight to nine months. Lewis says findings, published in an international journal, show barbers can act as mental health and suicide prevention gatekeepers, may help reduce community violence, and that female stylists are key connectors to children's mental health. He adds that 90% of participating barbers preferred support in a barbershop over a clinic.

• Mel's audience poll
When Mel's team polled her audience on Instagram, roughly one in five said there was not one person they felt they could go to. The quality people most wanted in a confidant was 'non-judgmental,' which Mel says is why people confide in hairdressers;

hers knows more than her therapist.

- **Quitting with minimal savings**

  Lewis left his hospital job with very little saved and a young daughter at home. Early barbers were skeptical ('we don't know who you are'), so he built credibility with a few committed shops and testimonials, then sponsors like Gillette and Andis. Seven years in, he believes going full time got them further than 10 slow years would have.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **'You are best equipped to help the person you used to be'**

  Mel shares this line from her friend Ed Mylett as the episode's challenge. You don't need a degree, permission or an invitation; look at the struggle you've lived through and who's still in it.

- **Use the four skills with people in your life**

  Listen actively, validate what they're feeling, respond positively without minimizing, and treat getting help as normal. Lewis compares it to CPR: it keeps someone going until professional help arrives. Know local resources so you can point people to them.

- **What's next for the Confess Project**

  Lewis has expanded the training to first responders, law enforcement, educators and counselors, and launched a virtual 'super user' program so trained people can teach others. His goal is to take the model worldwide.

The TRUTH About ADHD in Adults | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-06-19 · Duration: 0:58:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0R0xhDNPfwU

KEYPOINTS

• ADHD is a neurobiological disorder, not a character flaw

Mel shares the definition that changed how she saw herself: ADHD is a chronic neurobiological disorder that affects the brain structurally and chemically, as well as how different parts of the brain communicate. It is also highly heritable. She repeats throughout that she isn't a doctor and that this solo episode is meant to point people toward professional help, not to diagnose.

• Women are a 'lost generation' because the research started with boys

When ADHD became a diagnosis in the late 1970s, she says, researchers studied only boys. So girls whose symptoms looked different were often treated instead for anxiety, depression or eating disorders in their teens and 20s. Mel believes that's her story. She was treated for anxiety for decades and says she 100% believes the underlying issue was undiagnosed dyslexia and ADHD.

• Four differences between boys and girls

One: boys' symptoms show on the surface (fidgeting, impulsivity, being physical), while girls' are internal (daydreaming, forgetfulness, disorganization, being hard on themselves). Two: boys typically present around age 7, girls around 12. Three: boys wear it on their sleeve, while girls hide it and overcompensate to fit in. Four: boys tend to get better, girls tend to get worse.

• Undiagnosed girls face serious mental health risks

She reads from clinical psychologist Dr. Ellen Littman, co-author of Understanding Girls with ADHD, who calls the outcomes 'horrendously negative.' Anxiety and depression turn into low self-esteem and self-loathing, and Littman reports that the risk of self-harm and suicide attempts is four to five times higher for girls with ADHD. Mel stresses this goes far beyond homework.

• ADHD is trouble directing attention, not an inability to focus

Mel draws on Dr. Ned Hallowell and Dr. Daniel Amen. She describes attention as the prefrontal cortex switching between two networks. First it quiets the noise outside and inside you, like a grumbling stomach or stray thoughts. Then it amplifies what you mean to focus on. That's why her son Oakley could focus so hard on video games that he wouldn't hear pots banging behind him, which she points out isn't an appropriate use of attention either.

• The missing orchestra conductor

Her metaphor: a healthy prefrontal cortex is a conductor who shushes the horns, then cues the strings. In ADHD, the orchestra is always warming up. Trying to suppress noise and focus at the same time burns mental fuel. She says the brain uses about 25% of your calories just at rest, which is why people with ADHD end up both behind and exhausted.

• A critic you can't switch off feeds self-loathing

If the conductor can't quiet the default mode network, the inner voice saying 'why are you always behind?' never stops. Mel says Dr. Amen, who reports more than 60,000 scans, sees what look like 'holes' in the prefrontal cortex in ADHD brains, a sign of low blood flow he calls a 'sleepy brain.' She links that to chasing dopamine through shopping, alcohol and other addictive behaviors.

• Six lesser-known adult signs

Hyperfocus in some settings, followed by a collapse. Trouble controlling emotions, because there's no fuel left for frustration, which is why she snapped at her kids. Impulsive shopping and overspending. Time blindness. Looking high-functioning or workaholic while actually being scattered. And intense self-criticism. Mel says she has all six.

• Treat it the way you'd treat diabetes

Hating your diagnosis doesn't help. Understanding it lets you build supports and laugh at yourself. She also emphasizes ADHD's strengths: links to entrepreneurship, creativity, problem-solving and risk-taking.

EXAMPLES

• Diagnosed through her son at 47

When Oakley was in fourth grade, a neuropsych exam with Dr. Moldover in Wellesley found profound dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD. Reading the report, Mel asked pediatrician Dr. Mark Blumenthal whether she might have ADHD too. He told her she was probably the most ADHD parent in his practice, one of the roughly 20 parents who call in a panic every fall needing a sports physical. When she asked why he hadn't told her, he said, 'I'm not your doctor.' A specialist confirmed ADHD and dyslexia.

• Eight hours in Dartmouth's Baker Library

She'd haul books to the stacks for a full day of study, then get pulled away by hunger, the bathroom, and 'is that Emily?' She nearly failed a 400-student engineering class and calls herself the queen of all-nighters and procrastination.

• Jobs that fit her brain

Office jobs felt unbearable because she could hear every door and elevator ding. Even TikTok videos two rooms away sound like they're in her ears. She thrived waitressing, bartending and as a Legal Aid defense attorney in 1994, moving between her office, the court at 100 Canal Street and Rikers. Her current work suits her because no day is the same.

• Adderall, but not on keynote days

After her diagnosis, she tapered off anxiety medication and started long-acting Adderall, which she calls life-changing. She skips it on weekends and on speech days, when the adrenaline backstage gives her blinders. Stimulants worked for one of her kids but not all of them.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Build systems instead of blaming yourself

She spent a day pulling birthdays from Facebook into repeating Google Calendar events. When same-day alerts still didn't leave time to send gifts, she added a reminder a week ahead. She also learned that clutter has to be decluttered before it can be organized. More baskets weren't the answer.

- **Take a child's symptoms seriously**

  She cites research from the past five years suggesting that children with ADHD who receive treatment (behavioral therapy, plus medication where appropriate) have better outcomes, and that untreated kids face a higher risk of addiction. She calls treatment a personal choice and says to start with your pediatrician.

- **Adults: start with your primary care doctor**

  If you're a woman roughly 20 to 75 who was called a tomboy, scattered or a daydreamer, and you've struggled with anxiety, depression or disordered eating, she suggests a self-assessment for learning only, then a GP, a therapist or an online therapy platform for a real evaluation.

5 Tools For a Better Brain & 3 Daylight Savings Hacks from Dr. Amen | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Daniel Amen
Date: 2022-12-15 · Duration: 1:08:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzN77yhhLzw

KEYPOINTS

• Your brain's physical health creates your mind

Psychiatrist Dr. Daniel Amen dislikes the term "mental illness" and prefers "brain health issues," since the brain's physical functioning produces your thoughts and moods. Alzheimer's scans make this obvious, and he says COVID's brain inflammation is linked to a raised chance of new psychiatric symptoms in the months afterward. The effects are quick: sleep well tonight and your mind is better tomorrow; get drunk and it's worse.

• Three steps: brain envy, avoid what hurts it, do what helps it

"Brain envy" means actually caring about the three pounds between your ears. He contrasts it with his home town of Newport Beach, where people lavish attention on their faces and bodies instead. The second step is to know what harms the brain; he says most second graders would score 90% on a list of 100 brain-damaging things. The third is to do brain-helping things regularly.

• The "mother tiny habit": is this good or bad for my brain?

Developed after six months working with Stanford behavior scientist BJ Fogg, the habit is to pause for three seconds at each decision and ask whether it's good or bad for your brain. He says to answer it "with information and love": love of yourself, your family and your mission. It's his one recommendation if you only adopt a single change.

• Serotonin and dopamine counterbalance each other

He says low serotonin makes people worried, rigid, argumentative and quick to feel disrespected, which can look selfish but is really inflexibility. About 90% of the body's serotonin is made in the gut, but the brain makes its own from tryptophan, which needs a carbohydrate to reach the brain, so turkey with sweet potato works. When serotonin rises, dopamine tends to fall, which is why some patients on SSRIs feel happier but stop caring. One stopped doing his taxes, and Dr. Amen had to rebalance his medication.

• Drip dopamine, don't dump it

Dopamine is "the molecule of more." Cocaine, alcohol, nicotine and vaping, scary movies and new love all dump it, and he argues phones, social media and video games wear out pleasure centers over time. Instead, seek micro-moments like holding hands and eye contact. With new love, enjoy it but hold off on big decisions. He says signs of low dopamine include tiredness, low motivation, poor concentration and impulsivity, and the brain can recover within months.

• Chronic stress hormones shrink memory and add belly fat

Cortisol is essential, but he says chronically high levels from stress and negativity put fat on the belly and shrink the hippocampus, the brain's memory center. During his own grief about 17 years ago, he couldn't remember names. He argues news outlets profit from negativity because the brain notices threats first, so limit your consumption. Meditation, prayer, hypnosis and regular relaxation help, as does asking whether something is worth losing brain cells over.

• Don't believe every thought you have

He was 28, a psychiatry resident at Walter Reed, before a professor taught him this. Growing up as one of seven children, his mind used to "torture" him. He calls negative self-talk "ANTs," automatic negative thoughts, and treats thoughts like weather: suffering comes from attaching to them. The question he'd tattoo on himself is "Is it true?"

• Chronic tiredness has many possible causes

First get your thyroid checked, along with anemia and iron or ferritin. He looks at four areas: biological (infections, gut, hormones, sleep apnea, which he says both men and women should be checked for if they snore or stop breathing at night), psychological (ANTs driving up cortisol), social (conflict and unforgiven hurts) and spiritual (purpose, which he links to more dopamine).

• Muscle and brain reserve decide how you weather a crisis

At 68, Dr. Amen says strength lowers Alzheimer's risk and that frailty kills many older people. Muscle is your protein reserve, and the reserve you bring into an illness or accident often determines how you come out. He suggests walking "like you're late" about 45 minutes four or five times a week, plus strength training.

EXAMPLES

• Chloe's game and the orange juice test

With his young daughter Chloe, he'd call out foods: blueberries got "two thumbs up, God's candy," avocados "God's butter," Frosted Flakes "way too much sugar," and heading a soccer ball an eye-roll ("brain is soft, skull is hard"). Second graders he tested got only orange juice wrong, which he says is the sugar of four oranges.

• Supplements and the bonefish study

He takes a high-quality multivitamin and cites new placebo-controlled research in which a multivitamin, not cocoa extract, improved memory in people with memory problems. He says his clinics found 98% of people not taking supplements had suboptimal omega-3 levels, and omega-3s make up about 25% of nerve cell membranes. He cites a Florida International University study that found bonefish carried an average of seven pharmaceuticals, mostly antidepressants, as a reason for purified fish oil. Note that he sells his own supplements and light-therapy lamp.

• The pit bull attack and hand-rubbing

Walking his dog on the beach at Corona del Mar, two pit bulls charged; his dog ended up in the ocean and he was bitten. He did a session of EMDR, a trauma treatment using back-and-forth eye movements. On that beach now, he rubs his hands back and forth for bilateral stimulation to ease the anxiety, rather than turning to alcohol, marijuana or mushrooms, which he considers potentially toxic.

• His brain-healthy hot chocolate

Raw cacao, unsweetened almond milk and chocolate stevia, heated and blended. His rule is to eat only things he loves that love him back. Rocky road and beer don't qualify.

• Mel's sick-week spiral

On day four of being ill, Mel told herself her husband Chris was annoyed at caring for her and that people were angry about her cancellations. None of it was true, and she let the thoughts make her feel worse instead of questioning them.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Use the 15-second breath

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 1.5, breathe out for 8, hold for 1.5, using your belly. He says breathing out twice as long as you breathe in triggers a relaxation response and can stop a panic attack in two minutes or less, and that it works best when practiced regularly.

• Bookend your day

Each morning, say "Today is going to be a great day," or ask your kids at breakfast why it will be. At night, go on a "treasure hunt" for what went well, starting from the moment you woke up. He kept this up even the night his father died.

• Daylight-saving and winter mood fixes

Use a 10,000-lux light at arm's length for 20 to 30 minutes in the morning, without looking at it directly. Exercise, don't overdo caffeine, and block or turn off blue light after dark to protect melatonin. To boost dopamine, he suggests a cold finish to your shower and tyrosine-rich foods like eggs, almonds, beans, fish and chicken. Do focused work when your energy peaks, whether you're a morning lark or a night owl.

• Eat his five brain foods and cut toxins

His five are wild salmon, organic berries, nuts and seeds, leafy greens and raw cacao. Protect blood flow by limiting caffeine and nicotine and staying active, and keep learning, since he says the brain starts dying when you stop. Scan personal-care products with the Think Dirty app. His non-negotiables: don't say everything you think, don't deliberately wreck your sleep, and don't treat by symptom clusters alone.