Tune Up Your Brain, Module Three, Lesson One

Continual Learning:

The Key to a Healthier Brain

It's a law of nature – that which doesn't grow, dies.

If you don't use your leg, it atrophies, right? Same with your brain.

But there are many ways to learn, and it is not just about getting new information.

Learning is also about being exposed to and being able to contemplate different *perspectives*. Both new perspectives and new information help inspire neuroplasticity.

What is Neuroplasticity?

From the time the brain cells begin to form *in utero*, until we die, the connections among the cells in our brains reorganize according to our needs. This allows us to learn from and adapt to different experiences.

As we grow into adulthood, because we develop many more neural pathways, an activity handled by one part of the brain can be picked up by another part. Brain parts that pick up new activities increase in grey matter and have strengthened synapses. But brain parts that discard activities have weaker synapses and less grey matter.

So, the old adage is absolutely true – Use it …. Or lose it.

Because of this neuroplasticity, it is possible for us to reframe our world and rewire our brains so that we can be more objective. By continually learning and being exposed to new experiences, by learning a skill or even experiencing a life-changing moment, adaptations occur and you gain more power to see things as they are so you can respond thoughtfully, deliberately and effectively to challenging experiences.

What effects the development of these changes in the neurons and actual structure of the brain?

The environment, our own behavior, emotions and thought processes. These have a huge effect on our ability to learn, develop, retain memories, and recover from brain injuries.

There are structural changes in the brain that inspire neuroplasticity, which means the links between neurons get stronger or weaker. There are also functional changes, which means the way the synapses fire because of development and learning.

What we're going to be doing here is using the things that inspire POSITIVE structural and functional changes so that not only do you learn better, you will retain those memories.

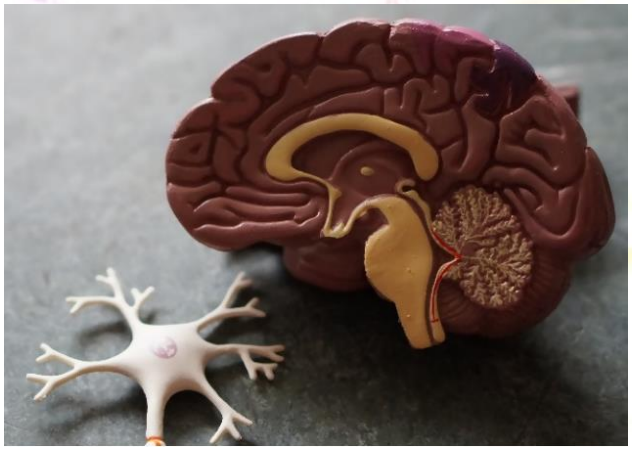
Mindset

In addition to being exposed to new experiences and perspectives, there is one other important trait that determines the neuroplasticity of your brain.

A *growth mindset* exists when you understand that abilities and understanding can be developed. When you believe that your learning capacity and skillset can be improved with constant time and effort, you have a growth mindset.

This is in contrast to a *fixed mindset*, which is the belief that your existing level of ability is "gifted" or basically fixed. People with this mindset think that either they have talents or skills or they don't, and they see no purpose in trying to change things.

If you believe that your abilities, intelligence, and talent are absolute, then you're less likely to make an effort to alter your aptitude. But if you believe that you can change these things, you will be more likely to put in the extra time and effort to attain your goals.



That said, however, there are some limitations to the power of a growth mindset.

Just telling yourself that you can improve is not enough. While making the effort is good, you have to focus on the RESULTS. If you're just making an effort without having a goal or achieving results, then you won't necessarily improve your brain.

This doesn't mean that all your efforts must result in a perfect conclusion for them to be valuable for neuroplasticity, but there must be an end game.

The most important part of a growth mindset for adults is to consider every setting as an opportunity to learn, and to continually seek more chances to enhance your skillset and knowledge.

Of course, you already know this….otherwise, you wouldn't be in this program!