

Module Five, Lesson Four

The Joyful Brain

Neuroscientists used to believe that our mental processes – thinking - originate from brain activity: that our brain is in charge when it comes to creating and shaping our mind.

But recent research shows that it can also work the other way around: that focused, repetitive mental activity can change your brain's structure, wiring, and capabilities.



That means that the actions we take and the thoughts that we think can literally expand or contract different regions of the brain, firing up circuits or ramping them down. The more you ask your brain to do, the more space it sets up to handle the new tasks.

It also responds by forging stronger connections in circuits that wire the desired behavior or thought while weakening the connections in others. Thus, what you do and what you think, see, or feel is mirrored in the size of your respective brain regions and the connections your brain forms to accommodate your needs.

Happy thoughts and positive thinking support brain growth, as well as the generation and reinforcement of new synapses, especially in your prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is the integration center of all of your brain-mind functions and gives you the ability to focus on whatever you choose.

It is the only part of your brain that can control your emotions and behaviors and help you focus on whatever goals you decide to pursue. It helps you grow as a human being, change what you wish to change, and live life the way you decide. Basically, it boils down to this: if you focus on joy, your brain expands and you can experience more joy.

How do we set that in motion? By doing the things that make you happy. Dance, sing, play music, play with your kids, volunteer, share your ice cream with someone.

Those are the obvious things, but there are also some beautiful suggestions in this [ARTICLE](#) . The tips in this article are based on Buddhist philosophy and contemporary neuroscientific studies that show we can deliberately incline our minds toward greater happiness. Highly recommended.