



Reprogramming Your Brain

Becoming More of a Positive Person

We often hear about how we need to engage in physical exercise in order to be healthy. There are many options for physical exercise. We can do aerobic exercise to increase breathing and heart rate; there are anaerobic options which strengthen muscles; flexibility exercises stretch muscles and help keep us limber; balance exercises are very important to prevent falls, especially as we age. All of these activities strengthen and reprogram specific parts of the brain. However, how often do we hear about the importance of reprogramming our brains from being a negative individual to being a positive person?

Understanding the Negativity Bias

The brain is programmed to be more sensitive to unpleasant news and thoughts. Therefore, we are more inclined to tune into negative news, worries and events. Our brains react more quickly and more powerfully to negative versus positive information. Biology and survival of the fittest has adapted our brains to be very alert, vigilant and self-protective. The problem with this, however, is that our brains are somewhat “lazy” and do not like to work any harder than they have to. Circuitry in the brain is wired over time to repeat itself consistently and efficiently. Therefore, if we complain, think negatively, worry and are always on guard, our brain becomes very efficient at doing this effectively and quickly. This will then become our default behavior.

The Importance of Rewiring for Positivity

A negative, worrisome and complaining person can be difficult to be around. In addition, it is difficult for one to live such a negative and vigilant lifestyle. Research from Stanford University also shows that complaining shrinks a part of the brain that is critical to problem solving and intelligent thought. Damage to this area of the brain, the hippocampus, is of concern, since it is one of the primary brain areas destroyed by Alzheimer’s Disease. Negativity and complaining is also bad for your physical health. Negativity releases the stress hormone cortisol. Cortisol shifts you into fight-or-flight mode, which takes oxygen, blood and energy away from all bodily systems except those

which are essential to immediate survival. Cortisol raises your blood pressure and blood sugar. This impairs your immune system and makes you more susceptible to high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, inflammatory and other diseases. It even makes the brain more vulnerable to strokes.

How to Reprogram The Brain

Set Your World Up:

I often ask my patients to “Set Your World up in a Way That It Feeds Back to You the Way You Want It To”. I encourage them to ask themselves, “Is This Thought or Behavior Consistent with Where I want to Be?” By taking time to mindfully monitor our thoughts and behaviors, we are responding more wisely and not reacting impulsively and emotionally. We, then, need to challenge and change our negative thoughts and behaviors.

Be Aware of Neuroplasticity:

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change. We have the ability to literally change the neurobiochemistry/pathways of the brain by **practicing** new, healthy thoughts and behaviors over and over. I ask my patients to pick out a thought or behavior. Then either literally practice it 5 times per day or do so in their minds. I encourage them to see themselves behaving or thinking through the more positive options at least 5 times per day. This is very important to reprogram the brain. We don’t just show up for the big ballgame, we have to practice, practice, practice in order for the brain circuitry and neurobiochemistry to be reprogrammed in a healthy and more effective way. This is how habits are developed.

Attitude of Gratitude:

In order to reprogram the brain in a positive manner, it is very important to develop the attitude of gratitude. Think and meditate on the positive things you have in your life as you are falling asleep at night rather than worrying and problem solving things that did not go well or focusing on how things might turn out in the future. Also, when you feel like complaining, focus on things for which you are grateful. Research conducted at the University of California, Davis, found that people who worked daily to cultivate an attitude of gratitude improve mood and energy, resulting in less anxiety due to lower cortisol levels. When you are tempted to engage in negative, worrisome or complaining thoughts, shift gears and think about something positive to reprogram the brain in that healthier direction.

Engage in Problem Solving:

To assist in reprogramming the brain in a positive manner, it is very important to develop the habit of solution-focused thinking and behaving. Stop to ask yourself what you hope to accomplish and instead of behaving or thinking in a negative and complaining manner, implement strategies for how an issue or situation can be resolved. Ask yourself what you wish was or could be different and how you can try to accomplish that. At times, remember that radical acceptance is in order for those things that we cannot change. If that end goal is to vent or get something off of your chest, that is fine. However, try to reprogram the brain and develop the habit of not complaining just for the sake of doing so without an end goal in mind

In conclusion, the negativity bias has evolved over time to be programmed within our brains for self-survival. Like many other things, however, there are both positive and negative aspects to everything over time. Please remember that just like other self-destructive habits, complaining and negative thoughts and behaviors are bad for you physically, emotionally, mentally and socially. Use some of the above suggestions to reap the physical, mental, emotional, social and performance benefits that come with a positive mind set.

John A. Glovan, Psy.D.
Director, Health and Wellness Program
Co-Founder, The Behavioral Wellness Group
8224 Mentor Ave #208 Mentor OH 44060
P: 440 392 2222 #302 F: 440 565 2349

jglovan@behavioralwellnessgroup.com
www.behavioralwellnessgroup.com