

MY
MYNDPROJECT
OUTSIDE YOUR MIND WHERE IS THE PROBLEM?

RETRAIN YOUR BRAIN



WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Learn how to retrain your brain.

Do you ever feel like your mind is working against you?

Maybe you find yourself getting anxious or stressed over things that seem trivial, or you feel stuck in negative thought patterns that you just can't shake. Well, the good news is that you're not alone, and there are things you can do to retrain your brain and start living a more positive, fulfilling life.

In this MYNDSET to Seth Gillihan's *Retrain Your Brain*, we're going to explore some practical strategies and techniques for retraining your brain and breaking free from negative thought patterns. We'll dive into the latest research in neuroscience and psychology, and we'll share what you can start doing today to improve your mental health. Whether you're dealing with anxiety, depression, or just feeling stuck in a rut, this MYNDSET is for you.



The following applications are now being studied, either clinically or via community / citizen science

RETRAINING OUR PLASTIC BRAINS

Have you ever wondered if it's possible to teach an old brain new tricks? Well, it turns out that our brains have an amazing capacity to reorganize themselves by forming new neural connections. That's right – our brains are capable of change, no matter our age or circumstances.

To illustrate this concept, imagine you're a taxi driver in London. To pass the grueling "Knowledge" exam, you have to memorize the city's complex street map, including over 25,000 streets and 20,000 landmarks. Sounds daunting, right?

Well, here's the amazing part: as you study and practice, your brain begins to form new neural connections and pathways, making it easier to remember the information. In fact, studies have shown that the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for spatial memory, is significantly larger in London taxi drivers than in the general population.

So, what does this mean for you? It means that you can apply the same principles of neuroplasticity to change your own habits and behaviors. Whether you want to eat healthier, exercise more, or reduce stress levels, you can start by breaking down your goals into small, achievable steps.

For example, if you want to start eating healthier, you can start by incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your diet or swapping out soda for water. These small changes may seem insignificant, but they can lead to bigger changes over time as your brain adapts and you form new habits.

It's also important to practice self-compassion throughout the process of rewiring your brain. Sure, it's easy to be hard on yourself when you fall short of your goals, but this only creates a negative cycle that's hard to break. Instead, you should practice self-compassion and be gentle with yourself as you navigate the ups and downs of creating new habits.

Imagine for a moment that you're a college student. You're struggling to keep up with your coursework and have fallen behind on a paper. Naturally, you feel overwhelmed and anxious about the situation.

In this scenario, you have two options. You can either beat yourself up for falling behind and add more stress and pressure to the situation, or you can practice self-compassion and give yourself the space and understanding you need to catch up.

To do so, you could take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that it's normal to struggle sometimes. You could give yourself permission to take a break and come back to the paper with a fresh perspective. You could also remind yourself of past successes and accomplishments to boost your confidence and motivation.

By practicing self-compassion in this way, you're not only reducing your stress levels and improving your mood, but you're also creating new neural connections in your brain that support positive self-talk and self-care.

THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS

Are you familiar with the experience of going through a tough breakup, or facing a challenging obstacle that triggers overwhelming negative thoughts and emotions? Maybe you've found yourself spiraling down a rabbit hole of self-doubt, regret, and frustration. It can be tough to pull yourself out of those dark places but there's a way to do it that's backed up by science – and that's mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness meditation is a simple yet powerful technique that involves paying attention to the present moment with curiosity, openness, and compassion. It's about noticing your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations without judgment or resistance. By doing so, you can train your brain to be less reactive and more responsive, less stressed and more resilient, less stuck in old patterns and more open to new possibilities.

Let's say you're going through a tough breakup and you're feeling all sorts of negative emotions – sadness, anger, regret, self-doubt, and so on. Now, imagine that instead of getting lost in these thoughts and emotions, you decide to practice mindfulness meditation.

First, find a quiet place to sit or lie down. Set a timer for ten or 15 minutes. Focus your attention on your breath. Don't try to change your breathing or suppress your thoughts and feelings. Simply observe them from a nonjudgmental, curious, and compassionate perspective.

As you continue to meditate, you might notice your mind wandering off into memories, fantasies, or worries. You might notice that you're tempted to react to your thoughts and feelings with resistance, avoidance, or self-criticism. But instead of getting frustrated or discouraged, remind yourself that this is all part of the practice. Gently bring your attention back to your breath, over and over again. Cultivate a sense of kindness and acceptance toward yourself, as well as toward the difficult experiences you're going through.

Now, you might be thinking, That sounds nice and all, but does it actually work? The answer is yes! In fact, there's a growing body of research that shows that mindfulness meditation can have a range of benefits for physical and mental health.

For example, one study showed a 50 percent reduction in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in participants who practiced mindfulness meditation for just eight weeks. Another study found that mindfulness practice was as effective as medication for treating depression and anxiety.

And these benefits aren't just limited to people going through a tough breakup. Anyone can benefit from mindfulness meditation, whether you're dealing with chronic pain, job stress, relationship problems, or just the daily grind of life.

So, how can you get started with mindfulness meditation? Well, the great thing is you can start meditating today, even if you've never done it before. Start with just a few minutes a day and gradually increase the duration. It's okay if your mind wanders – that's part of the process. The key is to bring your attention back to your breath as gently and as many times as you need to. You can also try guided meditations or use apps like Headspace or Calm to help you get started.



CHALLENGE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TO IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you feel anxious or stressed out and your mind immediately jumps to the worst-case scenario? Maybe you're nervous about a job interview and your mind starts to race with thoughts like, I'm going to bomb this interview and never get hired. Or maybe you're afraid to ask someone out on a date because you're convinced they'll reject you. These negative thought patterns are examples of cognitive distortions, which are the focus of cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT.

CBT is a type of therapy that aims to help you recognize and change these negative thought patterns, and can lead to more positive feelings and behaviors. The first step is to identify the cognitive distortions you're prone to. Some common examples include all-or-nothing thinking, where you see things as black or white, with no middle ground. Another is catastrophizing, where you imagine the worst-case scenario and assume it'll come true.

Once you've identified your cognitive distortions, the next step is to challenge them. For example, if you find yourself catastrophizing about a job interview, you can ask yourself, What's the evidence that I'm going to bomb this interview? You might realize that there's no evidence to support your negative thoughts – and that you're actually well-qualified for the job.

Another key component of CBT is behavioral activation, which involves gradually increasing activities that you find enjoyable or fulfilling. This can be especially helpful if you're dealing with depression or low mood. For example, if you used to love hiking but have stopped doing it because of depression, you might start by taking a short walk in a nearby park and gradually build up to longer hikes.

So, how can you start implementing CBT into your life today? One simple exercise is to start keeping a thought record. Whenever you notice yourself feeling anxious or stressed out, write down the thoughts that are going through your mind. Then, challenge those thoughts by asking yourself if they're based on evidence or if they're just assumptions. Finally, come up with a more balanced or realistic thought to replace the negative one.

Another exercise is to start scheduling activities that you enjoy or find fulfilling. Make a list of activities that you used to enjoy or that you've always wanted to try, and then start scheduling them into your week. Even if you don't feel like doing them at first, try to stick with it and see if your mood improves.

CBT is a powerful tool for changing negative thought patterns and improving your mood and behavior. By identifying your cognitive distortions and challenging them, and by engaging in enjoyable activities, you can start to feel more positive and fulfilled today.

THE BODY-BRAIN CONNECTION

Have you ever noticed how your mood can change after a good workout, or how a few nights of bad sleep can leave you feeling irritable and anxious? Your physical health and mental health are deeply intertwined, so let's dive into the importance of nutrition, exercise, and sleep in promoting mental wellness.

There's a reason why eating healthily and staying active is a common recommendation for improving your overall health. Studies have shown that diets high in processed and sugary foods can increase your risk of depression and anxiety, while a diet high in vegetables, fruit, and lean protein can help protect against these conditions. Exercise has also been shown to be effective in treating depression and anxiety, possibly due to the release of endorphins and the increase of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, a protein that helps regulate mood.

So, what can you do today to improve your diet and exercise habits? Start by incorporating more whole, unprocessed foods into your meals. Swap out that bag of chips for some sliced veggies with hummus, or trade in your sugary cereal for a bowl of oatmeal with fresh fruit. And don't forget about exercise – even a short walk around the block can boost your mood and energy levels.

Next up is sleep. You undoubtedly know that a good night's rest is important for your physical health, but it's just as crucial for your mental health as well. Lack of sleep has been linked to an increased risk of depression and anxiety, as well as decreased cognitive function. On the other hand, getting enough quality sleep can help improve your ability to handle stress and regulate your emotions.

To improve your sleep habits, start by setting a regular bedtime and wake-up time, even on the weekends. Avoid screen time for at least an hour before bed, and create a relaxing bedtime routine such as taking a warm bath or reading a book. Make sure your sleep environment is comfortable and conducive to sleep, with a cool temperature, minimal noise, and a comfortable mattress and pillows. And if you're struggling with insomnia, try implementing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation. A quick mindfulness meditation session could also work here.

The good news is that implementing small changes today can make a big difference in the long run. So go ahead and swap that bag of chips for some fresh veggies, take a relaxing bath before bed, and get outside for a walk. Your mind and body will thank you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Numerous studies have shown that social connections play a critical role in our well-being. For example, a study published in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior found that individuals who have strong social support networks are more resilient to stress and are less likely to experience depression and anxiety.

So here's how you can strengthen your social connections and reap the benefits of improved mental and physical health. First, make sure to prioritize face-to-face interactions. In today's digital age, it's easy to fall into the trap of relying on social media and other forms of digital communication to stay in touch with friends and family. While these tools can be useful, they can never fully replace face-to-face interactions. So, make an effort to prioritize in-person interactions whenever possible. Meet up for coffee, go for a walk together, or attend an event together.

When spending time with others, don't forget to be present and engaged. Put away your phone and focus on the person you're with. Ask them questions and actively listen to their responses. By being fully present, you'll strengthen your connection with them and deepen your relationship.

If you're new in town and don't know so many people, try joining a group or club. Whether it's a sports team, a book club, or a volunteer organization, being part of a group that shares your interests can help you build meaningful relationships with others.

And finally, don't forget to express gratitude to the people in your life – this can help strengthen your relationships and improve your mental well-being. Take a few minutes each day to think about the people in your life and what you appreciate about them. Then, let them know! A simple thank you or a heartfelt compliment can go a long way in strengthening your social connections.

So, there you have it. Why not reach out right now to someone important to you? Social connections are an important part of your life, so make an effort to prioritize them today.

FINAL

SUMMARY

“Your brain is capable of forming new neural connections and pathways to change habits and behaviors. Routines like mindfulness meditation can reduce depression, anxiety, and stress, while cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, can work to identify and change negative thought patterns. On the physical side of things, nutrition, exercise, and sleep can be three essential factors in promoting mental wellness. And don't discount your social life either, as strong social connections have also been shown to reduce stress and improve mental and physical health. Incorporating all these practices into your life can have a significant impact on your mental and physical well-being.

