

Simple Daily Practices to Strengthen Your Mind, Memory,
Moods, Focus, Energy, Habits, and Relationships

**CHANGE
YOUR
BRAIN
EVERY DAY**



#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DANIEL G. AMEN, MD

Want to think smarter, feel happier, have better focus, and remember more? The neuroscience-backed strategies to make that happen are all within the pages of Dr. Amen's new book *Change Your Brain Every Day*.

UMA NAIDOO, MD, Harvard nutritional psychiatrist, chef, nutritional biologist, and national and international bestselling author of *This Is Your Brain on Food*

What makes this book so special is that it goes beyond theory and includes practices you can put into action every day. Each practice builds on the previous ones, so by the end of the year, you'll have created a whole new life.

DR. DERWIN L. GRAY, cofounder and lead pastor of Transformation Church; author of *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and What the First Christians Knew, about Racial Reconciliation*.

Did you know you can improve your brain health in just a few minutes a day? Just one page a day of this book is all it will take to start turning your life and brain health around.

CHALENE JOHNSON, lifestyle and business expert, motivational speaker, *New York Times* bestselling author, and top-ranked podcaster

Scientific research has made it clear that our lifestyle choices affect brain health. And while some books can steer us toward a better brain outcome, the programs described are often vastly complicated and overwhelming. Dr. Amen's *Change Your Brain Every Day* lovingly gifts us the ability to alter our brain's destiny. He simply asks us to pursue one small change each day. And these changes ultimately aggregate to empower us with the attainable goal of a healthier, happier, and better functioning brain.

DAVID PERLMUTTER, MD, FACN, six-time *New York Times* bestselling author

Change Your Brain Every Day is a great addition to anyone's mental health tool kit! Dr. Amen gives you practical, easy-to-implement tips and strategies to improve your mental health and live your best life in just one year, based on his examination of more than 225,000 brain scans from 155 countries.

DR. CAROLINE LEAF, clinical neuroscientist and bestselling author of *Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess*

Every single day our brains are changing. They can be improving or declining, but they are *never* staying the same. This is why today, more than ever, having daily practices to take your brain health up a level is so valuable. *Change Your Brain Every Day* is a treasure trove of daily nuggets that will put your brain improvements on automatic.

SHAWN STEVENSON, bestselling author of *Eat Smarter* and *Sleep Smarter*

Change Your Brain Every Day is like getting a daily dose of Dr. Amen to enhance your memory, mood, and mindset.

JIM KWIK, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Limitless: Upgrade Your Brain, Learn Anything Faster, and Unlock Your Exceptional Life*

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DANIEL G. AMEN, MD



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Introduction

You are not stuck with the brain you have. You can make it better, even if you have been bad to it, and I can prove it. You can literally change your brain, and when you do, you change your life. Over the last 30 years, I've ended most of my lectures with the above words. It's the mission that drives my work. Your brain controls everything you do and everything you are. Each day it is changing. Either it is getting better and growing younger, or it is getting worse and growing older due to your daily diet, supplements, thoughts, decisions, and habits. This daily reader is designed to help you be the master of your brain's destiny and boost your memory, mood, focus, and overall sense of happiness and peace. Learning to love and care for your brain will also decrease your stress, improve your relationships, increase your chances of success in every area of your life, help you stave off dementia, and prevent you from becoming a burden to those you love.

As an example, meet my friend—journalist and media personality Leeza Gibbons. I got to know Leeza after being on her nationally syndicated television show in 1999 when my book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* was first published. She's brilliant, purposeful, and has a smile that brightens any room. We became friends after I'd been on her show several times. In getting to know her, I found out her mother and grandmother both died with Alzheimer's disease, which was incredibly stressful for them and for Leeza's family. Given that I knew that Alzheimer's disease runs in families and shows negative brain changes decades before people have any symptoms, I encouraged Leeza to come see me to get her brain scanned. At Amen Clinics we do a brain imaging study called SPECT that looks at blood flow and activity patterns; it is one of the best studies to evaluate the risk for Alzheimer's disease.

Initially, Leeza was hesitant to get scanned. Many people are afraid to know if their brains may be headed for trouble. But I told her, "If you knew a train was going to hit you, wouldn't you at least want to try to get out of the way?" After going through a stressful time, Leeza came to see me, and her SPECT scan showed several areas of very low blood flow. Her brain was clearly headed for trouble. Leeza took the results seriously and did everything I asked, which is all in the daily practices of this book. Ten years later, her brain was dramatically healthier, which is not what typically

happens with age. The images of her scans below tell a story—a story of hope. *You are not stuck with the brain you have. With the right guidance you can make it better, and I can prove it.*



At Amen Clinics, we have thousands of stories just like Leeza's. What did she do to reverse the aging process in her brain? What did she do to have a sharper brain 10 years later? That is the story in this book. Was it hard? No. Being sick is hard. Leeza saw brain health as a daily practice.

BRAIN AND MENTAL HEALTH ARE DAILY PRACTICES

Physical health is a daily practice. You cannot be 50 pounds overweight on Monday, have a salad that day for lunch, and expect to be trim by Friday. Ridiculous, right? Physical health takes consistent effort and daily practice over a long time, including eating right, smart supplementation, exercising, managing stress, and making many, many more good decisions than bad ones. Yes, you can take pills to help manage the diabetes, hypertension, and chronic pain that result from making many bad decisions, but they won't give you the energy and vitality you want.

In the same way, brain and mental health require daily practices, which are needed now more than ever. Anxiety disorders, depression, suicide, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and cognitive decline are at epidemic levels, as are the number of prescription medications purported to help these conditions. Alzheimer's disease is expected to triple in the coming decades, and since the pandemic, anxiety disorders and depression have more than doubled in children and adults. Something needs to change.

If you want to feel happier and more relaxed; if you want to be cognitively sharper and lower your risk for Alzheimer's disease as Leeza did, it will take developing consistent brain and mental health practices over time. *Change Your Brain Every Day* will show you how. In this book I share the daily practices I've learned on the other side of the neuropsychiatrist's couch (neuropsychiatrists are psychiatrists who believe brain health is foundational to helping their patients heal and thrive). For more than 40 years, I've worked with children, teenagers, and adults seeking to overcome anxiety, depression, obsessions, compulsions, addictions, anger, past emotional trauma, past head trauma, relationship issues, and memory and learning problems. This vol-

ume condenses those 40 years of knowledge and experience into a step-by-step, daily journey of brain optimization and healing. I use these daily practices in my life and encourage those around me to do the same.

Since 1991, my team at Amen Clinics and I have built the world's largest database of brain SPECT scans related to behavior, totaling more than 225,000 scans on patients from 155 countries. We have seen patients as young as nine months and as old as 105 years. Our brain imaging work has taught us many important lessons about the daily practices and habits of brain and mental health that we teach our patients.

If you sat on my neuropsychiatrist's couch every day for a year, these are the concepts and daily practices you would learn. This book contains 366 (in case you acquired it in a leap year) short essays organized around eight major themes:

1. Major life lessons I've gleaned from looking at more than 225,000 brain SPECT scans.
2. How to understand and optimize the physical functioning of the brain—what I call the hardware of your soul.
3. Learning to manage your mind to support your happiness, inner peace, and success—the “software” that runs your life.
4. Developing a lifelong plan to deal with whatever stresses come your way.
5. Using your brain to improve your relationships—your network connections.
6. Developing an ongoing sense of meaning and purpose that informs your actions every day.
7. Brain-focused nutrition and nutraceuticals (targeted supplements) to support your brain and mind.
8. Condition-specific wisdom, such as dealing with past trauma, anxiety, depression, addictions, ADD/ADHD, and more.

Each day will also have a simple practice for you to do: a tiny habit to try, a simple exercise, a question to ask yourself or others, a meditation, or an affirmation that over time will change the trajectory of your life.

Tiny habits are the smallest things you can do that will make the biggest difference in your life. Several years ago, I partnered with Professor B. J. Fogg, director of the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University, and his sister, Linda Fogg-Phillips, to develop tiny habits for our patients. You will find dozens of them in this book. B. J. and Linda teach that only three things change behavior in the long run:

1. An epiphany (seeing your brain scan can do it, like it did for Leeza)
2. A change in the environment (what and who surrounds you)
3. Taking baby steps or creating tiny habits¹

In my book *The End of Mental Illness*, I asked myself, if I were an evil ruler and wanted to increase the incidence of mental illness, what I would do? Society has a large impact on your brain and mind. I also asked, if I were a good ruler and wanted

to decrease mental illness, what strategies I would employ? You will find dozens of good ruler versus evil ruler strategies in this book so you know how to avoid the traps society lays for us.

Don't think you must do everything. Focus on a few simple ideas you can put into your life as time allows. The most important tiny habit you'll learn is this: Whenever you come to a decision point in your day, ask yourself, "Is this good for my brain or bad for it?" It will take only about three seconds, and if you can answer the question with information and love (love for yourself, your family, and your mission in life), you will quickly have a better brain. By using this habit, one of my patients told me, "I wake up at 100 percent every day because I stopped drinking alcohol, which was clearly not good for my brain."

It's up to you how fast you go through this book, but I recommend you just read a page a day. It'll only take a few minutes, but over time it'll change your life as you learn to think about and practice brain and mental health every day for a year. Just as I encourage my patients to lose weight slowly, so they develop the lifestyle habits that will help them stay trim and healthy for the rest of their lives, establishing these brain and mental health habits one at a time will help them last.

Let's get started changing your brain in a positive way every day.

DAY 1

Your Brain Creates Your Mind

Your brain is involved in everything you do, including how you think, feel, act, and interact with others. Your brain is the organ of intelligence, character, and every decision you make. Your brain creates your mind. It is the hardware of your soul. Your brain creates anxiety, worry, or a sense of peace. It stores traumatic events that continue to hurt you long after they've stopped, or it processes them for any important lessons to learn. Your brain focuses your attention on relevant material or on meaningless distractions; feels sadness or happiness; creates a healthy and a sick reality; and remembers what's necessary to make your life better and discards what's not.

In 2020, Justin Bieber released his docuseries *Seasons*, where he told the world I've been his doctor.² Fame is very hard on the brain, and it happened to Justin so early and so intensely that I'm happy he survived and is now an amazing young man. Before Justin came to see me, he had been diagnosed by another physician with bipolar disorder based on his symptoms alone, but his SPECT scan showed his brain had been hurt. I remember one day when he came into my office and said, "I think I understand what you've been trying to tell me. My brain is an organ just like my heart is an organ. If you told me I had heart disease, I would do everything you said. I am going to do what you say." By focusing on both brain and mental health together, he has continued to do well.

Your brain *is* an organ, just like your heart, lungs, and kidneys are organs. Yet most people who see cardiologists have never had a heart attack; instead, they are there to prevent them. I anticipate a day when psychiatrists will act in a similar way, when they will know the brain's risk factors (see the BRIGHT MINDS risk factors on days 7, 9, and 39–104) and address each of them in their patients as soon as possible. To have a better mind, you must first work to optimize the physical functioning of your brain.

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *List three reasons why you want or need a better brain.*

DAY 2

If You Are Struggling, Welcome to Normal

Normal is nothing more than a setting on a dryer or a city in Illinois. Years ago, I spoke at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Imagine what it was like to make an appearance on a “Normal” radio station, stop into a “Normal” restaurant, drive by a “Normal” high school, and even encounter “Normal” people. But what I noticed is that the people who lived in Normal faced many of the same problems I’d seen in my patients.

Too many people don’t get the help they need because of the shame they feel around mental health issues. They think that anxiety, depression, and problems with their focus or memory are not normal. But they’re wrong. Research shows that more than 50 percent of the population will struggle with a mental health issue at some point in their lives.³ If you are struggling with your brain or mind, welcome to normal.

If you are hurting, stop thinking you’re not normal and get the help you need. It’s the smart person who gets help, not the weak one. Think of an entrepreneur whose business is struggling. The smart businessperson will find the best consultant to help. Ignoring or denying the problem will lead to unnecessary stress and maybe even bankruptcy. If you are struggling, find the best doctor, psychiatrist, clinician, or therapist you can. When you realize that there are many others who struggle with the same problems you do, it’ll make you feel less alone and less ashamed, and you’ll be more likely to open up. As my wife, Tana, says, pain shared is pain divided.

TODAY’S PRACTICE: *Make a list of 10 of your friends. How many of them have needed help for their brain or mind in some way or another?*

DAY 3

When Your Brain Works Right, You Work Right

Free will is not black or white; it's gray. Our brain imaging work at Amen Clinics over the past three decades has shown us that having a healthy brain is fundamental to happiness and success. When your brain works well, it enables you to make better decisions for your life, which in turn positively affects your finances, relationships, health, and pretty much everything you do. Conversely, if your brain does not work well, you are more likely to face mental and physical health issues, have less success in relationships, and experience financial problems.

A key concept that is often overlooked in many books written about success is that optimal brain health is fundamental to achievement and prosperity. Yet the reality is, brain problems are very common and underlie a lot of failure and misfortune. They are often the missing link to failure and frustration. Undetected and/or untreated issues such as sleep apnea, concussive injuries, exposure to environmental toxins, substance abuse, and gestational trauma—to name a few—can cause a wide range of problems that interfere with a person's capacity to easily make good choices. Therefore, the idea that free will—having conscious control over one's actions—is something you either have or don't have is a misconception. Our work has shown us that free will, or the ability to intentionally choose one's behaviors, is dependent on how healthy a person's brain is; that it is not a black-or-white issue, but rather it actually falls into a gray zone.

In other words, the better overall brain function someone has, the more likely they are to exercise a high degree of free will. On the other hand, people whose brains are unhealthy often struggle with feeling ineffective in life and making good decisions for themselves. Consequently, they experience a diminished sense of free will.

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *Think of three or four people in your life whom you judge harshly. Is it possible that at least one of them has something going on with his or her brain that affects their behavior?*

DAY 4

Your Brain Is the Most Awe-Inspiring Creation

Do you know that the human brain has the storage capacity of six million years of The Wall Street Journal? Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is estimated to have 100 billion stars. Something so vast is hard to comprehend, but there's an organ even more complex and awe-inspiring inside your skull. The human brain has about 100 billion neurons, what we usually refer to as brain cells, and almost as many glia, which function as "helper" cells. Each neuron has multiple connections to other cells—some have just a few, while others can have more than 10,000. This adds up to having about 100 trillion connections in your brain, and all of them are important because they are constantly communicating with other cells and performing a vast range of functions.⁴

Despite the fact that your brain only weighs about three pounds and comprises just 2 percent of your full body weight, it uses a lot of energy. It needs 20 percent or more of your caloric intake. And it uses 20 percent of the blood flow in your body to supply it with a constant flow of vital nutrients and oxygen. Without these it cannot function well or for very long. This is critical to understand because anything that deprives your brain of oxygen, such as obstructive sleep apnea or carbon monoxide poisoning, can cause damage to your brain. Your very special brain makes you who you are, so it is critical to care for this most precious part of you.

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *Think of three world-changing accomplishments done by someone's brain.*

DAY 5

Brain Envy Is the First Step

Freud was wrong. Penis envy is not the cause of anyone's problem. I haven't seen it in 40 years of clinical practice. Brain envy is what everyone needs. Brain health basically comes down to three strategies:

1. Brain envy (you must care about your brain)
2. Avoid anything that hurts it
3. Engage in regular brain-healthy habits

Today, let's discuss brain envy. Early on when I began scanning brains, I had never thought about protecting or enhancing my own brain, even though I was the top neuroscience student in medical school, and at the time was a double board-certified psychiatrist. There was not one lecture on brain health during my five-year psychiatric residency program. In fact, the state of my own brain had never crossed my mind. That changed fast when I decided to scan my mom's brain. She was 60 years old at the time. When I looked at her scan, I saw a beautiful healthy brain. It looked much younger than she was and reflected her highly functional life as a wife, mother, grandmother, and golf phenom.

After seeing her brain, I decided to take a look at my own brain. What a contrast! My scan showed an unhealthy brain that looked much older than my 37 years. Several factors had harmed my brain, including high school football, having meningitis twice as a young soldier, and some bad health habits—fast food, poor sleep, and a lot of stress. I didn't like the fact that my mom's brain was better than mine. From then on, I developed "brain envy." I wanted a healthier brain like hers, so I spent decades working to improve it. If you look at my brain scan today, it is fuller, fatter, and healthier. Looking at the brain taught me that if I wanted to love my life, I had to start by loving my brain. I needed brain envy.

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *Write a love letter to your brain—even a short text will do.*

DAY 6

Doug Falls in Love with His Brain

“Seeing my brain was like seeing one of my children for the first time.” Doug was referred to me by a close friend because he suffered from brain fog and fatigue. He had lived in a mold-filled home, grown up on a farm where he was exposed to a lot of pesticides, and had many concussions from martial arts. He told me that seeing his scan was like seeing one of his children for the first time. He knew he had to take care of his brain and did not want to do anything to hurt it. That is brain envy.



Doug did everything I asked, including improving his diet, taking targeted nutraceuticals (supplements that help support and heal your health, in his case a high-quality multiple vitamin, high-dose omega-3 fatty acids, and a brain boosting supplement), and using hyperbaric oxygen therapy. Within a few weeks, he started to feel much better. After three months, his scan had dramatically improved (see image). The brain fog lifted and his brain was better, as was his energy, endurance, mood, and memory, proving one of the most exciting lessons of brain scan work: Once you fall in love with your brain, it can get better, even if you have mistreated it.

Yet most people never care about their brains. Why? Because you can't see it. You can see your greasy hair, dry skin, or extra weight and change it if you don't like it. But not many people have a chance to peer into their brains, so why would they care about it? Brain imaging changed everything for me and Doug. If you don't yet love your brain, consider taking a look at it.

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *Meditate on this question: Do you love your brain like you love the important people in your life? If not, why not?*

DAY 7

Avoid Anything That Hurts Your Brain

If you want to keep your brain healthy or rescue it if it's headed for trouble, you must prevent or treat the 11 major risk factors that steal your mind. What hurts the brain? You probably know some of the obvious ones: drugs, excessive alcohol, infections, toxic chemicals, and head injuries. The lesser-known factors include being overweight; sleep apnea; high blood pressure; diabetes, prediabetes, and high blood sugar levels; drugs for anxiety; highly processed foods that have been sprayed with pesticides and include added sugar and artificial ingredients; having hormones out of whack; too much stress, negativity, and hanging out with people who have bad habits. Reflect on which of these issues are impacting your brain.

Warren Buffett has two rules of investing: Rule #1 Never lose money. Rule #2 Never forget Rule #1. In the same way, the most important rules of brain health are as follows: Rule #1 Never lose brain cells. Rule #2 Never forget rule #1. Losing brain cells is much harder to recover from than any financial loss.

At Amen Clinics we developed the mnemonic BRIGHT MINDS to help you remember the 11 major risk factors that steal brain cells and lead to cognitive impairment. You can prevent or treat almost all of these risk factors, and even the ones that you can't, such as having a family history of dementia, can be minimized with the right strategies. Here are the 11 BRIGHT MINDS risk factors (in subsequent days we'll go into much more detail).⁵

Blood flow

Retirement/Aging

Inflammation

Genetics

Head trauma

Toxins

Mental health

Immunity/Infections

Neurohormone issues

Diabesity

Sleep issues

TODAY'S PRACTICE: *Take the Memory Rescue Quiz to see which BRIGHT MINDS risk factors you may have: memoryrescue.com/assessment.*