

Wake Up Your Brain for Greater Health, Wisdom, and Success

BY ANAT BANIEL

Research in neuroscience has established that the brain can create new connections and possibilities for us throughout life. It was believed that once we are past our early years, the brain could only change for the worse through loss of nerve cells, neural connections, and the rigidifying of existing patterns.

But research in the science of brain change (neuroplasticity) shows that the brain can change for the better at any age. As the famed neuroscientist Michael Merzenich said, “The brain is constructed, by its own nature, to change itself.”

How can we take advantage of this remarkable potential we all have?

We first need to understand that the brain is the CEO. It puts order in disorder and makes sense out of nonsense. From birth on, through a multitude of experiences, our brain gets apprenticed, forming the connections and patterns that in turn enable it to organize all that we do and who we are.

The brain is also an information system. When we want to discover new and better ways to move, think, relate, feel, or act—to be healthier and more successful—the brain needs new information to work with. What is the source of new information to the brain? Stimulation coming in through our senses. However, stimulation alone is not enough.

Have you ever tried unsuccessfully to figure out what a friend is telling you in a loud room? But when you both moved to a quieter place,



you had no trouble understating what she was saying? How come?

In the quieter room your brain could discern the difference between background sounds and the sounds that your friend was producing as she spoke. The brain needs to perceive differences within the flow of stimulus for it to have informational value.

In other words, if we want to wake up our brain and provide it with the new information it needs to move past its limitations toward greater health, vitality, and success, we need to enhance our ability to perceive differences.

Here are four ways, supported by brain science, to do just that.

Move with Attention Movement is the language of the brain and is essential for its growth and formation. As Einstein said, “Nothing happens until something moves.” Movement is also essential to our health and is part of all action. However, for movement to help our brain form new connections, we need to pay attention to what we feel as we move. When we move automatically, research shows there are no detectable changes in the density

of connections in the brain. But when we pay attention to what we feel as we move, millions of new connections are formed per minute. So when you walk down the street, prepare a cup of coffee, type on your device, wash dishes, lift weights, or engage in any other activity, pay close attention to what you feel in your body as you move and notice the spontaneous and often surprising changes you experience in body and mind.

Slow Down Fast, you can only do what you already know. For the new to occur, you need to slow way down. One of the most common mistakes I see when people fail at learning something new, or to go past limitations, is that they go too fast. Slow gets the brain’s attention; slow provides the brain with the opportunity to notice and perceive differences. Slow gives your brain access to its brilliant potential. When you want to improve the way you do a certain movement, to think more clearly about an issue, to improve the way you relate to a loved one, slow way down, and you’ll be amazed at the spontaneous discoveries you will make.

Employ Subtlety The less effort or intensity you apply, the easier the brain can perceive a change. Without the perception of a change or a difference, there is no new information. Great efforts in our body, intense emotions, extreme beliefs inhibit our brain's ability to discern differences in order to gain new information for transformation. When we reduce the effort, we immediately gain more freedom, and new possibilities open up. This is counterintuitive for so many of us, who were told that the way to gain success and accomplish what we want requires trying harder, pushing more, doing more repetitions. Yet the brain thrives with reduced forcing because it can then perceive differences and wake up to do its job better.

Use Variation When you are stuck, when something is not working the way you would like it to, or when you simply want to do even better than you are already doing, instead of continuing to repeat yourself, begin doing the same thing in different ways. You can think of it as intentionally making mistakes or being playful. For example, if you are a golfer, for a few minutes hit the ball in a variety of ways, hold the club in three or four "wrong" ways, try different positions, then go back to simply hitting the ball and experience, often, remarkable improvement.

Using these four essentials, people with back, neck, and joint pain have found relief. Athletes, musicians, and dancers have recovered fully from injuries and found themselves performing better than before, and children with special needs such as cerebral palsy and autism have developed into fully functioning adults.

Engaging in this process of increasing complexity in the brain is what we humans are built to do. It is our human destiny to continue this process. It gives us vitality, health, freedom, creativity, and awareness, which are the foundation of our evolution.

The Hebrew word *shichlul* sums this up. It means "improvement and refinement through increased complexity." In the Kabbalah, *shichlul* means "crowning beauty" — the ultimate expression of our humanity. 🍀

Anat Baniel is the founder of the Anat Baniel Method NeuroMovement (ABMNM), a powerful approach and practice that takes advantage of the brain's ability to change itself to heal body and mind. She is trained as a clinical psychologist and dancer, and was a close professional associate of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais.
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