A portrait of Daniel G. Amen, MD, a middle-aged man with thinning grey hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a black blazer over a black t-shirt. The background is plain white.

*Unlock Your Brain's
Healing Potential
to Overcome
Negativity,
Anxiety, Anger,
Stress, and Trauma*

**FEEL BETTER
FAST
— AND —
MAKE IT LAST**

DANIEL G. AMEN, MD

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Feel Better Fast and Make It Last gives you the latest fascinating and important neuroscience information on how to boost your mood, quiet anxiety, and increase your overall brain health. I highly recommend it.

ANDREW NEWBERG, MD

Thomas Jefferson University; coauthor of *How God Changes Your Brain*

Life is full of challenges for everyone. But contrary to what you may believe, these events need not preclude your ability to be happy and joyful. In *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last*, Dr. Daniel Amen gives us a powerful array of tools to redirect our brains away from despair and grief to a place of happiness, gratitude, and love. This book is truly a precious gift.

DAVID PERLMUTTER, MD

Author of #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Grain Brain* and *The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan*

This book is delightful to read, a guide full of useful information for all of us that will help our brains and help our lives and our habits. All of us who have read it have been helped by it.

ANDREW CAMPBELL, MD

Editor in chief, *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*

Feel Better Fast and Make It Last is the one book about the brain that you'll want to read this year. I have been working with Dr. Amen for the past 25 years, and this book is his most exciting work yet. Do you want to discover the secrets of quantum change? If you want to transform your life, take the practical steps outlined in this book, which will help you feel better fast and make it last. This book will give you what you need to bring lasting change to your brain. *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last* is your manual for transformed life!

DR. EARL HENSLIN

Clinical psychologist and author of *This Is Your Brain on Joy*

Daniel has taught me (and countless others) the critical role our brain health plays in our careers, families, and overall quality of life. If you truly value the relationships in your life, stop what you're doing and read this book.

TODD DAVIS

FranklinCovey's chief people officer; *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices to Build Effective Relationships at Work*

This book is your map to an abundant life! Imagine sitting down with one of the smartest, most passionate doctors on the planet and getting a personalized plan for the healthiest version of you. That is the experience of reading *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last*.

To know Dr. Amen is to believe that your life can be all it was meant to be. This book feels like sitting with him in his office and getting his personal plan for your healthiest life.

Healthy people build healthy families. Healthy families create a healthy world. If you want to positively change your life and the lives of generations that will follow you, you must read this book!

JEN ELMQUIST, MA, LMFT

Mental and relational health expert and author of *Relationship Reset*

Our choices determine our results, and our results determine our success. It all begins with choices. But the question is, which choices are right? How can we choose to live with joy, creativity, and prosperity, and free ourselves from depression and panic? With his astonishing new research, Daniel Amen has unlocked the answers. In this book, you'll discover new aspects of who you are and who you can become. Once you understand your own emotions and behaviors, you can replace the negative with a positive future. This book outlines the game plan to your most fascinating and fulfilling life.

SALLY HOGSHEAD

New York Times bestselling author and creator of the Fascination Advantage® personality test

Dr. Daniel Amen keeps writing cutting-edge, easy-to-understand books on what is most important to a healthy and happy brain. This is his best book yet. Dr. Amen shows us how we can all have good brains, overcome life's main stressors, and foster healthy lives. *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last* has motivated me to change my lifestyle, keeping the health of my brain in mind. This book will be on my "must read" list for all my clients—and my family members.

Dr. Amen's *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last* is a get-you-thinking and start-changing book that doesn't make you feel guilty but educates you into wanting to live with your brain as your first priority.

I could not put down *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last*, as it was readable, easy to understand, and related to my life. It shook me up and gave me new habits of asking myself each day, "Is this good or bad for my brain?" and making daily decisions based on "Will this make me feel good now but not later?" Dr. Amen's contribution to brain health is helping us all improve our lives.

SHARON MAY, PhD

Founder of Safe Haven Relationship Center and author of *Safe Haven Marriage*

We've all found ourselves reacting to one event or another—landing in a place we never expected to be. These ground-shaking moments can leave us feeling anxious, sad, angry, scared out of our minds, or worried. We want help, and more importantly, we need it *now*. We don't have to remain stuck in our pain. Dr. Amen's simple, hands-on, and very doable steps can change what seems unchangeable. Why wait, struggle, or hope for tomorrow when you can feel better fast today?

SHERI KEFFER, PhD

Author of *Intimate Deception: Healing the Wounds of Sexual Betrayal*

A SAMPLE OF OTHER BOOKS BY DANIEL AMEN

Memory Rescue, Tyndale, 2017

Stones of Remembrance, Tyndale, 2017

Captain Snout and the Super Power Questions, Zonderkidz, 2017

The Brain Warrior's Way, with Tana Amen, New American Library, 2016

The Brain Warrior's Way Cookbook, with Tana Amen, New American Library, 2016

Time for Bed, Sleepyhead, Zonderkidz, 2016

Change Your Brain, Change Your Life (revised), Harmony Books, 2015, *New York Times* Bestseller

Healing ADD (revised), Berkley, 2013, *New York Times* Bestseller

The Daniel Plan, with Rick Warren, DMin, and Mark Hyman, MD, Zondervan, 2013, #1 *New York Times* Bestseller

Unleash the Power of the Female Brain, Harmony Books, 2013

Use Your Brain to Change Your Age, Crown Archetype, 2012, *New York Times* Bestseller

The Amen Solution, Crown Archetype, 2011, *New York Times* Bestseller

Unchain Your Brain, with David E. Smith, MD, MindWorks, 2010

Change Your Brain, Change Your Body, Harmony Books, 2010, *New York Times* Bestseller

Magnificent Mind at Any Age, Harmony Books, 2008, *New York Times* Bestseller

The Brain in Love, Three Rivers Press, 2007

Making a Good Brain Great, Harmony Books, 2005, Amazon Book of the Year

How to Get Out of Your Own Way, MindWorks, 2005

ADD in Intimate Relationships, MindWorks, 2005

Preventing Alzheimer's, with William R. Shankle, MS, MD, Penguin, 2004

Healing Anxiety and Depression, with Lisa Routh, MD, Putnam, 2003

Healing the Hardware of the Soul, Free Press, 2002

New Skills for Frazzled Parents, MindWorks, 2000

The Most Important Thing in Life I Learned from a Penguin!?, MindWorks, 1995

*Unlock Your Brain's Healing Potential to Overcome
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MAKE IT LAST**

DANIEL G. AMEN, MD
1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



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Feel Better Fast and Make It Last: Unlock Your Brain's Healing Potential to Overcome Negativity, Anxiety, Anger, Stress, and Trauma

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MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

The information presented in this book is the result of years of practice experience and clinical research by the author. The information in this book, by necessity, is of a general nature and not a substitute for an evaluation or treatment by a competent medical specialist. If you believe you are in need of medical intervention, please see a medical practitioner as soon as possible. The stories in this book are true. The names and circumstances of the stories have been changed to protect the anonymity of patients.

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Introduction

YOU CAN FEEL BETTER FAST AND MAKE IT LAST: THE BRAIN-XL APPROACH

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.

ATTRIBUTED TO ARISTOTLE

Virtually all of us have felt anxious, depressed, traumatized, grief-stricken, or hopeless at some point in life. It's perfectly normal to go through hard times or experience periods when we feel panicked or out of sorts, whether we have a diagnosable condition or not. How we respond to these challenges makes all the difference in how we feel—not just immediately, but in the long run.

All of us want to stop the pain quickly. Unfortunately, many people self-medicate with energy drinks, overeating, alcohol, drugs, risky sexual behavior, angry outbursts, or wasting time on mindless TV, video games, social media, or shopping. Although these substances and behaviors may give us temporary relief from feeling bad, they usually only prolong and exacerbate the problems—or cause other more serious ones, such as energy crashes, obesity, addictions, sexually transmitted diseases, unhappiness, relationship problems, or financial ruin.

I am a psychiatrist, a brain-imaging researcher, and the founder of Amen Clinics, which has one of the highest published success rates in treating people with complex and treatment-resistant mental health issues such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety and mood disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, and more. Thanks to all of this experience, I understand how critical it is for you to know *what will help you feel better right now and later*. In this book I'll be highlighting strategies that will lead you to experience more joy, peace, energy, and resilience, both immediately and in the future.

Plenty of things may help in the short term but will make you feel

worse—or cause more problems—in the long term. Here are two stories that illustrate how the right remedies can set you on a healthier, happier course.

CHRIS: HELP FOR A GRIEVING MOM

I met Chris at my Northern California clinic when I was there giving a lecture. She told me that two years earlier she had lost her 12-year-old daughter, Sammie, to bone cancer. Chris had no idea how hard Sammie's death would hit her. Every night she went to bed with Sammie's illness and death playing over and over in her mind. Chris ate more and drank alcohol as a way to cope and quiet her mind, but most mornings she woke up in a panic, and the terror would follow her through her days. She felt so useless and depressed that she had secretly planned on killing herself on the two-year anniversary of Sammie's death.

Just a few weeks before the anniversary, Chris was visiting with a friend of her sister's, whom she described as very fit, with a positive attitude. Chris, who is just five feet one inch tall, weighed a little more than 200 pounds and was walking in a gloom so heavy she thought she'd never smile—and mean it—again. “This friend had a copy of the *Change Your Brain, Change Your Body Daily Journal*,” Chris explained. “Flipping through it, I thought, *Okay, I like this. It makes sense to me. I have to start looking for the brighter side of life.* After all, my choices at that point were to take my life, drink myself to death, or end up in rehab. And I was way too proud to go to rehab.” Chris went home and downloaded my book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Body* and read it cover to cover in one night. “I can still remember how I felt in the moment when I read . . . that alcohol stops you from feeling ‘empathy and compassion for others.’ I knew I needed to get my feelings of empathy and compassion back for my other children and husband. I needed to find a way to be happy and whole again for their sakes and my own.

“I went hard-core into the plan,” Chris said. “In fact, I did a 28-day cleanse. I tossed out all the alcohol, ate no processed food, and began taking fish oil and vitamin D.” Chris felt better nearly immediately. “Within eight days I didn't care if I never dropped a pound again. I was free! Because I was eating food that actually nourished my cells, the food and alcohol cravings stopped. I got rid of all the diet drinks and colas. I slept through the night for the first time in four years, and I didn't wake up in a panic.” After 10 weeks she had lost 24 pounds and was running four days a week. After five months she was down 35 pounds and had lost eight inches off her waist.

Her skin was brighter, and she felt like a completely new woman. Of course she will never forget her daughter, but there is no way that Sammie would have wanted her mother to be in such pain. Now Chris believes that Sammie would be proud of her.

The best time to start healing from a crisis is before it starts. Giving yourself the excuse to eat bad food, drink alcohol, or smoke pot to deal with the pain only prolongs it. Never let a crisis be your excuse to hurt yourself.

If you're like me, when you hurt, you want to feel better now, fast, pronto! During my psychiatric training I had a wonderful supervisor, Dr. Jack McDermott, who was a world leader in psychiatry. I loved his mentorship on how to help children, teens, adults, and families who were hurting. In his professional evaluation of me at the end of the year, he wrote, "Dr. Amen is a bright, competent, and caring physician, who will make a wonderful psychiatrist; but he needs to be more patient. He wants people to get better fast." Then and now, I don't see wanting people to get better quickly as a problem. That is what people who are in pain want. No one wants to be patient. No one wants a prolonged process. They want to feel better fast, and they want that feeling to last.

LEIZA: REVERSING DEPRESSION AND MEMORY PROBLEMS

Leiza, an attractive woman with flaming red hair, was 50 years old when she first came to our Atlanta clinic. She had seen one of my public television programs and brought her teenage son to us for ADHD because he had not responded to treatment. She also decided to be scanned because, as she said, "I'm very scattered, always late, and my memory is poor. . . . My father and his mother had dementia, and I don't want it. . . . I really feel like I am in the early stages of dementia. . . . I am tired of being depressed and beating myself up." She had been an actor and then a stay-at-home mother for 20 years. As her children were becoming more independent, she wanted to act again, but she didn't believe she could. She told one of her friends, "I could never go back to work. I can't remember anything. I can't focus. I can't make any decisions."

The two years before Leiza came to see us were the most challenging in her life. She had felt a lot of anxiety while taking care of her son's learning disabilities, her daughter's depression, and her father's dementia, and in dealing with the death of her mother-in-law. With the chronic stress, Leiza noticed more problems with her memory. She would make appointments and then

forget to show up, despite having put the appointment on her calendar. Six months before her appointment with us, she was diagnosed with ADHD and put on Adderall, but she didn't think it helped her.

As part of our workup of Leiza, we did a brain imaging study called SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography), which looks at blood flow and activity—essentially, how the brain works. Her SPECT scan showed severe decreased blood flow across her whole brain, which was very concerning given the family history of Alzheimer's disease. Our research, and that of others, has shown that Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia start in the brain decades before people have any symptoms. Leiza was already symptomatic, and her brain showed that she was headed for the same fate as her father and grandmother.

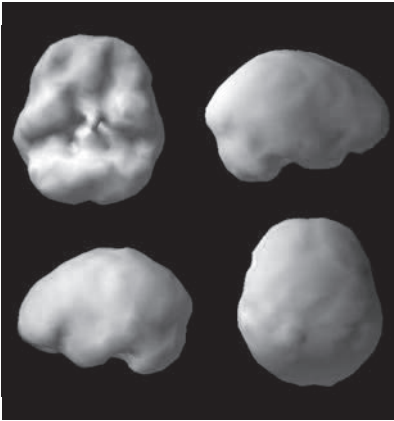
Leiza's scan was the wake-up call she needed to get serious about rehabilitating her brain *now* if she wanted to feel better fast and avoid eventually being a burden to her children. She was motivated to do everything we recommended, including taking supplements and doing a treatment called hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT; see appendix A, page 292), which boosts blood flow to the brain. Within several months she noticed significant improvement in her mood, focus, and memory. She started to audition for television and landed a lead role in a TV pilot as the FBI director. She told me none of it would have been possible without rehabilitating and caring for her brain. Her follow-up scan two years later showed remarkable improvement, which is something we have seen repeatedly over the past three decades. Your brain can be better and you can feel better—and we can prove it!

How to Read SPECT Scans

Throughout this book you'll see a number of SPECT scans from Amen Clinics patients.

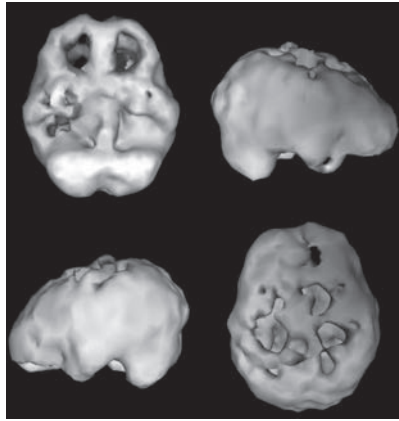
We will include four images; they show the brain first from underneath and then, moving clockwise, from the right side, the top, and the left side. For detailed information about how the SPECT scan works and who should get one, see "When Should You Think about Getting a Functional Imaging Study, Such as SPECT?" on page 271.

HEALTHY SPECT SCAN



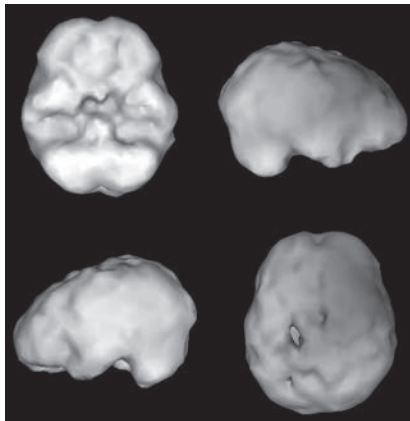
Full, even, symmetrical activity

LEIZA'S SPECT SCAN



Holes indicate areas of severe decreased blood flow.

LEIZA'S AFTER TREATMENT SPECT SCAN



Marked overall improvement

THE MISSING STRATEGY TO FEELING BETTER FAST

One of the most important secrets to our success at Amen Clinics is that we focus first on understanding, healing, and optimizing the physical functioning of the brain (hardware), and second on properly programming it (software). Both always work together, and if you ignore one while only working on the other, you will have a harder time consistently feeling better.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of professionals who are trained to help

people who are struggling with how they feel receive little to no training on how to heal and optimize the brain, which limits their success. I recently lectured to 5,000 mental health professionals and asked them how many had received *any* training on how to optimize the physical functioning of the brain during their education; fewer than one percent raised their hands.

Physicians have been trying to drug the brain into submission since the 1950s. The outcomes have been poor because doctors too often ignore the necessity of first putting the brain into a healing environment by addressing issues such as sleep, toxins, diet, exercise, and supplementation. Dr. Thomas Insel, former director of the National Institute of Mental Health, wrote, “The unfortunate reality is that current medications help too few people to get better and very few people to get well.”¹ In contrast with antibiotics, which can cure infections, none of the medications for the mind cure anything. They only provide a temporary bandage that comes off when the psychotropic medications are stopped, causing symptoms to recur. In addition, many of these medications are insidious; once you start on them, they change your brain chemistry so you need them in order to feel normal. There is a better way. *Feel Better Fast and Make It Last* is the manual that helps you unlock your brain’s healing potential to quickly overcome negativity, anxiety, anger, stress, grief, and trauma.

Honestly, I, too, undervalued brain health for nearly a decade as a young psychiatrist until our group at Amen Clinics found a practical way to look at the brain. Before we started our brain imaging work in 1991, I had been trained and board-certified as a child-and-adolescent psychiatrist and general psychiatrist and was busy seeing children, teens, adults, and older adults with a wide variety of issues connected with mental health, including depression, bipolar disorder, autism, violence, marital conflict, school failure, and ADHD. During that time, I was flying blind and not thinking much about the actual physical functioning of my patients’ brains. Researchers at academic centers told us that brain imaging tools were not ready for clinical practice—maybe someday in the future.

I loved being a psychiatrist, but I knew we were missing important puzzle pieces. Psychiatry was, and unfortunately remains, a soft, ambiguous science, with many competing theories about what causes the troubles our patients experience. In medical school and during my psychiatric residency and child-and-adolescent psychiatry fellowship, I was taught that while we really didn’t know what caused psychiatric illnesses, they were likely the result of a combination of factors, including

- Genetics—but no one knew exactly which genes were the real troublemakers;
- Abnormal brain chemistry—which gave us many medications to try, but they only worked some of the time;
- Toxic parenting or painful childhood experiences—but some people thrived even though they were raised in abusive environments, while others withered;
- Negative thinking patterns—but correcting the erroneous thought patterns helped some people and not others.

The lack of neuroimaging led to a “brainless” psychiatry, which kept my profession steeped in outdated theories and perpetuated stigma for our patients. I often wondered why all other medical specialists looked at the organs they treated—cardiologists, for example, scanned the heart, gastroenterologists scoped the gut, and orthopedists imaged bones and joints—while psychiatrists were expected to guess at what was wrong by talking to patients. *And we were dealing with the most complicated organ of all—the human brain!* Our patients are every bit as sick as those with heart disease, osteoporosis, or cancer. Depression, bipolar disorder, addictions, and schizophrenia are all potentially lethal disorders, and even issues such as chronic stress, anxiety, and ADHD can affect all aspects of our lives.

IMAGING CHANGED EVERYTHING

In 1991, everything changed for me. My lack of respect for the brain vanished almost instantly when I started looking at the brains of my patients with a nuclear medicine study called SPECT, mentioned in Leiza’s story on page xvi. It is different from CT or MRI scans, which look at the brain’s anatomy or structure. SPECT looks at brain function, which is helpful because functional problems almost always precede structural problems. SPECT is a leading indicator of trouble, pointing to issues years before they manifest, while CT and MRI are lagging indicators of trouble that reveal abnormalities later in illnesses. SPECT basically answers a key question about each area of the brain: Is it healthy, underactive, or overactive? Based on what we see, we can stimulate the underactive areas or calm the overactive ones with supplements, medicines, electrical therapies, or other treatments, all of which optimize the brain. We can also help patients ensure that the healthy areas of their brains stay healthy.

Almost immediately after starting to look at scans, I became excited about

the possibilities of SPECT to help my patients, my family, and myself. The scans helped me be a better doctor, as I could observe the brain function of my patients. I could see if their brains were healthy, which meant the issues they were facing were more likely to be psychological, social, or spiritual rather than biological in nature. I could see if there was physical trauma from concussions or head injuries, causing trouble to specific areas of the brain, or if there was evidence of toxic exposure from drug or alcohol abuse (addicts rarely admit to how much they are using, but it is hard to stay in denial when looking at a damaged brain) or other toxins, such as mercury, lead, or mold. I also could see if my patients' brains worked too hard, which is associated with anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

I was so excited about imaging that I scanned many people in my own family, including my 60-year-old mother, who had one of the healthiest SPECT scans I had seen. Her scan reflected her life. As a mother of seven children and grandmother and great-grandmother of 44, she has always been everyone's best friend. At the time of this writing, she has been married to my father for 68 years, and she is consistently loving, attached, focused, and successful in every way, including being the club golf champion and a top golfer for more than 50 years. After scanning my mom, I scanned myself, and my results were not so good. I had played football in high school and gotten sick with meningitis as a young soldier, plus I had a lot of bad brain habits, such as not sleeping more than four hours a night, struggling with being overweight, eating junk food, and being chronically stressed at home and at work. Seeing my mom's scan and then my own, I fell in love with my brain and vowed to make it better. I also developed what I call brain envy. I come from a very competitive family and was highly irritated that my 60-year-old mother had a better-looking brain than I did at 37. Much of my life after that moment has been about making my brain better and teaching others what I learned about how to do it. When my brain was rescanned 20 years later, it was much healthier.

Now, close to 30 years after we started to look at the brain at Amen Clinics, we have built the world's largest database of nearly 150,000 brain SPECT scans on patients from 120 countries. Our work has clearly taught us that unhealthy brain function is associated with a higher incidence of

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Panic
- Brain fog
- Poor focus
- Addictions
- Domestic violence
- Incarceration
- Loneliness

- Suicidal behaviors
- Violence
- School failure
- Divorce
- Dementia

By contrast, healthy brain function is correlated with improved

- Happiness
- Joy
- Energy
- Resilience
- Focus
- Longevity
- Relationships
- School performance
- Business success
- Wealth management
- Creativity

This is what feeling better looks like. As your brain becomes healthier, you will experience fewer of the problems on the first list and more of the rewards on the second. And as these positive personal characteristics take hold, you'll experience constructive changes in your attitude, your ability to respond to challenges, and your sense of purpose.

THE BRAIN-XL APPROACH

Using the mnemonic, or memory aid, BRAIN-XL as our framework, I'll introduce you to the latest research, as well as our clinical experience, to help you feel better fast and make it last. First, I want to acquaint you with the four aspects of health, which I often share with my patients: biological, psychological, social, and spiritual. They all work together, and we need to be aware of each one as we take steps to feel better. If there's a root biological cause for our problems, such as a genetic inheritance or the lasting effects of a head injury, we need to deal with that first. But we also need to be aware of psychological aspects, like negative thought patterns or an early childhood trauma, as well as the way our social interactions and connections can affect us. And finally, our health can have a spiritual component. When we have a strong sense of purpose—of living for something larger than ourselves—we find inspiration that can go a long way to helping us feel better. As we work through the BRAIN-XL acronym, we'll touch on all of these areas.

I chose BRAIN-XL because improving your brain health is the core strategy of the program, and XL has many terrific meanings, including *excel*, *extra large*, *extra load*, *extended life*, and *extra love*. Of course, no one feels joyful all the time, but with an understanding of how your physical brain, mental processes, social attachments, and spiritual connection work and some

strategies that will enhance their functioning, you are more likely to love your life and feel better every day. Here is what BRAIN-XL stands for:

B Is for Brain

Chapter 1: Use Your Brain to Rescue Your Mind and Body. Whenever you feel sad, mad, nervous, or out of control, it is critical to have emotional-rescue techniques. This chapter will introduce you to six powerful practices to help you feel better fast.

Chapter 2: The Missing Strategy. The secret to feeling better fast now and for a lifetime is to immediately work on optimizing the physical functioning of your brain. This chapter summarizes my latest thinking on how to help you have the best brain possible, as quickly as possible.

Chapter 3: Control Yourself. Are you impulsive, distracted, and disorganized . . . or thoughtful, focused, and organized? The part of your brain that determines which of these descriptions fits you is the *prefrontal cortex*, or *PFC*, in the front third of your brain. Neuroscientists call it the “executive” part of the brain because it acts like your own internal chief executive officer or boss. This chapter will help you strengthen your PFC to make great decisions and avoid ones that can ruin your life.

Chapter 4: Change Is Easy—If You Know How to Do It. Your brain likes to do what it has always done, even when that is not in your best interest. Getting stuck in unhelpful behaviors, holding grudges, and engaging in unproductive worrying all cause immense suffering. There is an area deep in the frontal lobes called the *anterior cingulate gyrus*, the brain’s gear shifter, which allows you to move from thought to thought or idea to idea. When this part of the brain is healthy, you are flexible and adaptable, and you can easily shift your attention and learn from your mistakes. When it is overactive, you can get stuck on negative thoughts (obsessions) or behaviors (addictions), say no even when saying yes may be good for you, and notice what is wrong a lot more often than you notice what is right. This chapter will help you optimize this part of the brain to turn your ruts into superhighways of success.

R Is for Rational Mind

Chapter 5: Master Your Rational Mind. Once the physical functioning of your brain is healthy, it is critical to know how to strengthen your rational mind.

This chapter will help you develop the mental discipline necessary for feeling better fast, including eliminating the ANTs (automatic negative thoughts), quieting your mind, focusing on gratitude, and even welcoming failure.

A Is for Attachments

Chapter 6: Healing Connections. Our attachments bring us the greatest joys and the most painful sorrows. When relationships are stressed or break apart, people become unhappy and vulnerable to acting in counterproductive ways. In a computer analogy, social attachments are like network connections. The way the brain is functioning is often the missing piece in understanding healthy or difficult relationships, trauma, and grief. This chapter explores how to use your brain to improve any relationship, helping you to feel better fast. Knowing this information can help you save your job, your marriage, your friendships, or your relationships with your children—or all four.

Chapter 7: Overcoming Trauma and Grief. Emotional trauma can get stuck in the brain, causing your emotional circuits to overfire—sometimes for years. This chapter explores healthy ways to eliminate the hurts that haunt you.

I Is for Inspiration

Chapter 8: Create Immediate and Lasting Joy. True inspiration comes from knowing why you are on the planet and grasping the meaning and purpose underlying what you do. Knowing and acting on your “why” is critical to living each day with joy. Purposeful people are happier and healthier, and they live longer. This chapter shows you how to protect your brain’s pleasure centers to live with passion and purpose and avoid addictions and depression. This knowledge can help you feel joyful every day.

N Is for Nourishment

Chapter 9: The Feel Better Fast Diet. Your brain needs a constant source of energy to run your life. Think of it as the battery that powers your life. This chapter explains which foods you need (and which you should toss) to immediately boost your focus, memory, and mood.

Chapter 10: Advanced and Brain-Type Nutraceuticals. This chapter gives you a personalized, targeted approach to getting the nutrients your brain and body need. It provides detailed descriptions of the nutraceuticals I think everyone should take, together with ones targeted to specific brain types.

X Is for the X Factor

Chapter 11: Think Different. In any given situation, the X factor is the variable that has the most significant impact on the outcome. That perfectly describes the brain imaging work we've been blessed to do at Amen Clinics. It changed everything we do. By looking at the brain in people who had complex problems or were treatment resistant, we gained new insights that often made the difference between success and failure, healing and maintaining illness, even life and death. This chapter reveals the top 10 lessons we and our patients have learned from our experience with brain SPECT imaging. It also lists the circumstances in which you or a loved one should consider a scan.


L Is for Love

Chapter 12: Love Is Your Secret Weapon. Doing the right thing is the ultimate act of love for yourself and others. Here you will learn about the science of epigenetics and how caring for your brain and body can impact generations to come. That really makes the good feelings last a long time.

IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE TO FEEL BETTER FAST?

Many people, mental health professionals included, think therapy needs to be long, hard, and painful. They believe that if you start medication for anxiety or depression, you're making a lifelong commitment. Certainly some people will need help longer than others, but in my experience, many people can feel better fast if they engage in the right behaviors and strategies, which include knowing about and optimizing their brains.

Think about it: You know you can make yourself feel worse almost immediately by dwelling on the worst possible outcome of a situation, spending time with highly toxic people, or sabotaging each of your senses with dreadful sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or sights. You can just as easily make yourself feel better through simple choices like practicing gratitude, surrounding yourself with caring people, and using many other techniques that I will demonstrate throughout the book.

 **Keep an eye out for the stopwatch:** You will find it next to strategies that work quickly to help you feel better. The stopwatch will indicate the amount of time, up to 60 minutes, you need to devote to that strategy for it to begin to work. Although there are many helpful and valuable strategies

in the coming pages, I am highlighting the fast-acting ones so that you can choose them when you need the most immediate relief.

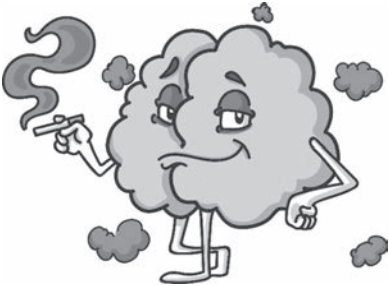



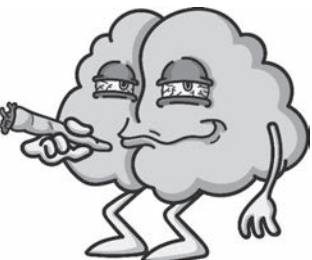



The truth is, we live in an impatient society. When people seek help for mental health issues, the most common number of therapy sessions they receive is one. Either they find benefit from getting their worries off their chests and learning simple strategies—or they conclude therapy won't be helpful for them. Even when they commit to ongoing therapy, the average number of sessions a patient attends is six or seven, regardless of the psychotherapist's theoretical orientation.²

Almost everyone wants to feel better fast, and research suggests it is possible. Studies since the 1980s have shown the value of single-session therapies (SSTs). In one study, a single session of hypnosis significantly decreased anxiety and depressive symptoms after coronary artery bypass surgery.³ In another, Australian researchers found that 60 percent of children and teens with mental health issues showed improvement after 18 months from just one session of therapy.⁴ On page 190, I share the story of a man who was suffering from crushing grief and was helped by just one session with famed psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl. The components of SSTs are helping people tap into their strengths, offering simple solutions, and providing support—three strategies that I will also provide throughout the book.

Helping people change their feelings and behaviors and optimize their lives has been my passion as a psychiatrist for the past four decades. Amen Clinics partnered with Professor BJ Fogg, director of the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University, and his sister, Linda Fogg-Phillips, to help our patients with behavior change. They teach that only three things change behavior in the long run:

1. An epiphany
2. A change in the environment (what and who surrounds you)
3. Taking baby steps⁵

When Leiza saw her troubled SPECT scan, it was a wake-up call for her to get healthy, as it is for so many of our patients. When I read a study by my friend Dr. Cyrus Raji⁶ on what I call the dinosaur syndrome (as your weight goes up, the size and function of your brain go down—with a big body and a little brain, you're likely to become extinct), I had an epiphany and found the discipline to lose 25 pounds. But you don't have to wait for an epiphany to change your behavior. You don't need to have a heart attack or get cancer in order to get serious about your health. Most people can change their environment (friends, workplace, church) or the people they surround

FEEL BETTER FAST NOW BUT NOT LATER	FEEL BETTER FAST NOW AND LATER
 A cartoon brain character with a sad expression is smoking a cigarette. A large question mark is drawn next to it, and small clouds of smoke are floating around.	 A cartoon brain character is jogging happily on a path. It is wearing a headband and has a determined, happy expression.
 A cartoon brain character is drinking from a bottle. It has a dazed expression with stars and a halo around its head.	 A cartoon brain character is meditating with its eyes closed and hands in a prayer position. It is surrounded by a bright, radiating glow.
 A cartoon brain character is smoking a pipe. It has a smug, satisfied expression.	 A cartoon brain character is meditating with its hands clasped. A bright sun is visible in the background behind it.
 A cartoon brain character is sitting on the floor, watching a television. It has a wide-eyed, happy expression.	 A cartoon brain character is wearing large headphones and dancing. It has a happy expression and is surrounded by musical notes.

themselves with, and all of us can make small changes that, over time, create amazing results.

High motivation helps you do hard things. But if your motivation is medium or even low, you can still change for the better. In fact, the Fogg's encourage starting with baby steps, or what they call "Tiny Habits."⁷ These are easy changes that will boost your sense of accomplishment and competence and, over time, evolve into bigger changes. At the end of each chapter, look for a list of Tiny Habits that you can incorporate each week, one or more at a time. Each one is tied to a habitual activity you do every day—like getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, answering the phone, or driving your car—which serves as a prompt to remind you to take action. The Tiny Habits format is "When I do x (or when x happens), I will do y ." Then when you do y , celebrate to reinforce the new behavior and good feeling. Celebrations can be as simple as a fist pump or saying an "Atta boy" or "Atta girl" to yourself. Remember, small daily improvements are the key to spectacular long-term results.

Here's one you can start right now that will make a huge and lasting change: Whenever you come to a decision point in your day, ask yourself, "Is the decision I'm about to make good for my brain or bad for it?" If you consistently make decisions that serve your brain's health—and you'll learn more about how to do that in each chapter of this book—you are well on your way to feeling better fast in a way that will make it last.

PART 1

B IS FOR BRAIN

Amen Clinics are virtually unique in our focus on the brain as the source of many of our patients' problems. We always begin by addressing the brain's physical function and then move on to how it is programmed. It's absolutely necessary to do both. Sadly, many people forget the brain—or try to tame it with drugs, a temporary fix that will wear off sooner or later, causing symptoms to return. These next four chapters will give you brain-based strategies to gain control over anxiety, worry, sadness, stress, and anger.

In chapter 1 we'll look at quick, practical strategies that will help you feel better fast and pave the way for longer-term change, whether you're trying to rescue a bad day or dealing with an issue such as chronic anxiety or depression. Think of this as a toolbox you can put to immediate use. Then in chapters 2 through 4, we'll consider the brain's hardware, looking at specific areas of the brain that control different aspects of our mental processes. I'll give you lots of ideas for how you can help your brain function better.

CHAPTER 1

USE YOUR BRAIN TO RESCUE YOUR MIND AND BODY

QUICK TECHNIQUES WHEN LIFE FEELS OUT OF CONTROL

Climbing above one's difficulties always takes carefully considered action. There is always a way out, but it's easier to move effectively with the help of an experienced guide.

SIR EDMUND HILLARY, THE FIRST CONFIRMED MOUNTAIN CLIMBER
TO SUMMIT MOUNT EVEREST

It was 6:30 in the morning in the busy emergency room at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. I was just putting on my white lab coat as I walked through the doors to the unit. It was my third day as an intern, and the emergency room would be my home for the next month. Down the hall from me, a woman was screaming. Curious, I went to see what was going on.

Beth, a 40-year-old patient, was lying on a gurney with a swollen right leg. She was in obvious pain and screamed whenever anyone touched her leg. Bruce, a brand-new psychiatry intern like me, and Wendy, the internal medicine chief resident, were trying to start an IV in Beth's foot. She was anxious, scared, uncooperative, and hyperventilating. A blood clot in her calf was causing this tremendous swelling. The IV was necessary so Beth could be sent to the X-ray department for a scan that would show exactly where the clot was, allowing surgeons to operate and remove it. With each stick of the IV needle to her swollen foot, Beth's screams became louder. Wendy was obviously frustrated and irritated, and sweat started to roll down her temples.

"Calm down!" she snapped at the patient.

Beth looked scared and confused. There was a lot of tension in the room.

Wendy paged the surgeon on call. She paced during the several minutes it took for him to get back to her. When the phone rang, Wendy quickly answered it, saying, "I need you to come to the ER right away. I need you to do a 'cut down' on a patient's foot. It looks like she has a blood clot in her leg, and we need to start an IV before sending her to X-ray. Her foot is swollen, and she's being difficult!"

Wendy listened for a few moments and then said, "What do you mean you can't come for an hour? This has got to be done right away. I'll do it myself." She cursed as she slammed down the phone.

Hearing this, Beth looked even more panicked.

Being new, I didn't want to say anything, especially because I had heard of Wendy's reputation for harassing interns, but I hated to see Beth in pain. *This is going to be an interesting day*, I thought to myself. I took a deep breath.

"Wendy, can I try to start the IV?" I asked softly.

She glared at me, and with a tone that was both sarcastic and condescending, she said, "Your name is Amen, right? I've been starting IVs for five years. What makes you think you're so special? But if you want to try and look stupid, hotshot, go for it." She rudely tossed the IV set at me and left the room. I motioned to Bruce to shut the door.

The first thing I did was walk around the gurney to Beth's head and establish eye contact with her. I gave her a gentle smile. Wendy had been yelling at Beth from the other end of the gurney, at her feet.

"Hi, Beth, I'm Dr. Amen. I need you to slow down your breathing. When you breathe too quickly, all of the blood vessels constrict, making it impossible for us to find a vein. Breathe with me." I slowed my own breathing, thinking that Wendy was going to kill me when I finished.

"Do you mind if I help you relax?" I asked. "I know some tricks."

"Okay," Beth said nervously.

"Look at that spot on the ceiling," I said, pointing to a spot overhead. "I want you to focus on it and ignore everything else in the room . . . I'm going to count to 10, and as I do, let your eyes feel very heavy. Only focus on the spot and the sound of my voice. 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . let your eyes feel very heavy . . . 4 . . . 5 . . . let your eyes feel heavier still . . . 6 . . . 7 . . . 8 . . . your eyes are feeling very heavy and want to close . . . 9 . . . 10 . . . let your eyes close, and keep them closed.

"Very good," I said as Beth closed her eyes. "I want you to breathe very slowly, very deeply, and only pay attention to the sound of my voice. Let your whole body relax, from the top of your head all the way down to the bottoms of your feet. Let your whole body feel warm, heavy, and very relaxed. Now

I want you to forget about the hospital and imagine yourself in the most beautiful park you can imagine. See the park—the grass, the hillside, a gentle brook, beautiful trees. Hear the sounds in the park—the brook flowing, the birds singing, a light breeze rustling the leaves in the trees. Smell and taste the freshness in the air. Feel the sensations in the park—the light breeze on your skin, the warmth of the sun.”

All of the tension in the room had evaporated. Wendy popped her head in the room, but Bruce put his index finger to his lips and motioned for her to leave. She rolled her eyes and quietly shut the door.

“Now I want you to imagine a beautiful pool in the middle of the park,” I continued. “It is filled with special, warm healing water. In your mind, sit on the edge of the pool and dangle your feet in it. Feel the warm water surround your feet. You are doing really great.”

Beth had gone into a deep trance.

I went on. “Now I know this might sound strange, but many people can actually make their blood vessels pop up if they direct their attention to them. With your feet in the pool, allow the blood vessels in your feet to pop up so that I can put an IV in one and you can get the help you need, still allowing your mind to stay in the park and feel very relaxed.”

In medical school, I took a monthlong elective in hypnosis. I had watched a film of an Indian psychiatrist who put a patient in a hypnotic trance and had her dilate a vein in her hand. The doctor stuck a needle through the vein and then removed it, causing blood to flow out of both sides of the vein. Next, at the doctor’s suggestion, the patient stopped the bleeding, first on one side of the vein and then the other. It was one of the most amazing feats of self-control I had ever seen. Beth’s situation reminded me of the film. In truth, I had no expectation that she would actually be able to dilate the vein in her foot.

To my great surprise, the moment I made the suggestion, a vein clearly appeared on top of Beth’s swollen foot. I gently slipped the needle into the vein and attached it to the bag of IV fluid. Bruce’s eyes widened. He couldn’t believe what he had just seen.

“Beth,” I said softly, “you can stay in this deep relaxed state as long as you need. You can go back to the park anytime you want.”

Bruce and I wheeled Beth to X-ray.

When I returned to the unit an hour later, Wendy gave me a hostile look, but I smiled inside.

With the right plan, you can feel better fast and make it last, even when you are in the midst of an emotional or physical crisis. That is why I have

provided the following emergency rescue plan, which includes the techniques I used to help calm Beth—hypnosis, progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery—among others. Before we get to the plan, it is critical to understand how your brain and body work in a crisis, especially as it relates to your emergency alarm system—the fight-or-flight response.

THE FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT STRESS RESPONSE

The fight-or-flight response is hardwired into our bodies to help us survive. It is mobilized into action whenever a stress appears, such as what happened to Beth in the emergency room. Harvard physiology professor Walter Cannon first described the fight-or-flight response in 1915. He said it was the body's reaction to an acute stress, harmful event, or threat to survival, such as experiencing an earthquake or being robbed—or having the chief resident scream at you while she is poking you with a needle. Acute stress activates the sympathetic nervous system, which prepares you to either put up a fight or flee a dangerous situation. The fight-or-flight response is triggered by

1. the amygdala, an almond-shaped structure in the temporal lobes that is part of the limbic or emotional brain, which sends a signal to
2. the hypothalamus and pituitary gland to secrete adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH), which signals
3. the adrenal glands, on the top of the kidneys, to flood the body with cortisol, adrenaline, and other chemicals to rocket you into action.

The graphic on pages 8–9 illustrates what happens in our bodies when this response is set off.

The fight-or-flight response is part of a larger system in the body called the autonomic nervous system (ANS). It is called “autonomic” because its processes are largely automatic, unconscious, and out of our control, unless we train it otherwise (more on that coming up). It contains two branches that counterbalance each other: the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Both regulate heart rate, digestion, breathing rate, pupil response, muscle tension, urination, and sexual arousal. The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is involved in activating the fight-or-flight response, while the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) helps to reset and calm our bodies.

Our very survival depends upon the fight-or-flight response, as it helps

move us to action when there is a threat. But when stress becomes chronic, such as if you live in a war zone, grow up in an unpredictable alcoholic home, are sexually molested over time, or wet your bed and wake up every morning in a panic, your sympathetic nervous system becomes overactive. When that happens, you are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, panic attacks, headaches, cold hands and feet, breathing difficulties, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, digestive problems, immune system issues, erectile dysfunction, and problems with attention and focus.

In his groundbreaking book *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, Stanford University biologist Robert Sapolsky pointed out that for animals such as zebras, stress is generally episodic (e.g., running away from a lion) and their nervous systems evolved to rapidly reset. By contrast, for humans, stress is often chronic (e.g., daily traffic, a difficult marriage, job or money worries). Sapolsky argued that many wild animals are less susceptible than humans to chronic stress-related illnesses such as ulcers, hypertension, depression, and memory problems.¹ He did write, however, that chronic stress occurs in some primates (Dr. Sapolsky studies baboons), specifically individuals on the lower end of the social dominance hierarchy.

In humans, one big stress (such as being robbed, raped, or in a fire) or multiple smaller stressors (such as fighting with your spouse or children on a regular basis) can turn on a chronic fight-or-flight state in the body, leading to mental stress and physical illness. But you can learn to quiet your SNS and activate the PNS, which will lead you to feel calmer, happier, and less stressed. Improving the PNS is associated with lower blood pressure, more stable blood sugar, and better energy, immunity, and sleep.

THE FEEL BETTER FAST RESPONSE

After I finished my psychiatric training in 1987, I was stationed at Fort Irwin in California's Mojave Desert. Halfway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, Fort Irwin was also known as the National Training Center—the place where our soldiers were taught to fight the Russians (and later others) in the desert. At the time, I was the only psychiatrist for 4,000 soldiers and a similar number of their family members. It was considered an isolated assignment. There were problems with domestic violence, drug abuse (especially amphetamine abuse), depression, and stress-related ailments from living in the middle of nowhere. I dealt with many people who suffered from headaches, anxiety attacks, insomnia, and excessive muscle tension.

THE FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT RESPONSE



Threat: an attack, harmful event, or threat to survival



Brain: processes the signals, beginning first in the amygdala and then in the hypothalamus

ACTH

ACTH: pituitary gland secretes adrenocorticotropic hormone



Cortisol released



Adrenaline released

PHYSICAL EFFECTS



Heart beats faster and harder



Bladder relaxes



Pupils dilate for better tunnel vision, but there is a loss of peripheral vision



Erections are inhibited (other things to think about)



Air passages open and rapid shallow breathing increases



Blood pressure increases



Production of tears and saliva decreases



Digestion slows



Hearing diminishes



Muscles become tense; trembling may occur. Muscles around hair follicles constrict, causing goose bumps



Blood vessels shunt blood to upper arms and upper legs (fight or flee) and away from hands and feet, which get colder



Veins in skin constrict (colder hands and feet) to send more blood to major muscle groups (to fight or flee), causing the "chill" sometimes associated with fear



Blood sugar level increases for energy



Brain has trouble focusing on small tasks; it's thinking only of dealing with the threat



Immune system shuts down

Shortly after arriving at Fort Irwin, I went through the cabinets in the community mental health clinic, which was housed in a World War II Quonset hut, to see what helpful tools had been left behind by my predecessors. To my delight, I found an old biofeedback temperature trainer. Biofeedback is based on the idea that if you get immediate feedback on the physiological processes in your body, such as hand temperature, breathing, or heart rate, you can learn to change them through mental exercise. I had attended one biofeedback lecture during my psychiatric training, so I dusted off the old machine and started using it with patients who had migraine headaches. My staff and I taught them how to warm their hands using only their imaginations. Hand warming triggered an immediate parasympathetic relaxation response, which significantly decreased their migraine pain. It was fascinating to see how patients could raise their hand temperature with their minds, sometimes by as much as 15 to 20 degrees. Temperature training taught patients how to participate in their own healing process.

A few months after arriving at Fort Irwin, I wrote a request to our hospital commander, asking him to buy \$30,000 worth of the latest computerized biofeedback equipment for our soldiers, including 10 days of training for me in San Francisco. While he laughed at me at first, eventually I got approval simply because he needed to spend his whole budget by the end of the year.

The biofeedback training was the most stimulating and intense learning experience I'd had as a physician. I learned how to help people relax their muscles, warm their hands (much faster than with the old equipment), calm sweat-gland activity, lower blood pressure, slow their own heart rates, breathe in ways that promoted relaxation, and even change their own brain wave patterns.

When I returned to Fort Irwin, my patients loved biofeedback because it helped them feel better fast. I loved it for the same reason and spent time each day doing it myself. I became masterful at breathing with my diaphragm, and I could slow my heart rate and even warm my own hands more than 15 degrees whenever I felt stressed. I had struggled with anxiety for most of my early life, which came in part from having an older brother who beat me up regularly when I was young, and in part from wetting my bed at night until about age nine. Waking up every morning in a panic, not knowing if the sheets would be wet or dry, changed my nervous system to be on alert and expect bad things to happen. Using these tools to calm myself was a wonderful relief.

Based on my work with hypnosis, biofeedback, and quickly enhancing brain function, here are six simple techniques that use your brain to control your mind and body, helping you to feel better fast.

Technique #1: Use hypnosis, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation to enter a deep, relaxed state.

Many people associate hypnosis with loss of control or stage tricks. But doctors know it to be a serious science, revealing the brain's ability to heal medical and psychiatric conditions. "Hypnosis is the oldest Western form of psychotherapy, but it's been tarred with the brush of dangling watches and purple capes," said psychiatrist David Spiegel, MD, the son of a famous hypnotist and associate chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine. "In fact, it's a very powerful means of changing the way we use our minds to control perception and our bodies. . . . The power of hypnosis to immediately change your brain is real."²

Using hypnosis, guided imagery, or progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) increases parasympathetic tone and can quickly decrease the fight-or-flight response in a wide variety of conditions, as it did for Beth. These techniques have been found to have many benefits, including lowering anxiety, sadness, and tension in parents of children with cancer;³ pain and fatigue in those receiving chemotherapy;⁴ stress in those with multiple sclerosis;⁵ anxiety and depression;⁶ migraine frequency;⁷ tension headaches;⁸ craving and withdrawal symptoms in people quitting smoking;⁹ poststroke anxiety (a result of listening to a PMR CD five times a week);¹⁰ and phantom limb pain.¹¹ They can also improve quality of life in the elderly¹² and dialysis patients,¹³ fatigue in the elderly, and sexual function in postmenopausal women.¹⁴

Learning hypnosis, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation is simple; there are many online audios that can guide you. We have several on our Brain Fit Life site (www.brainfitlife.com). You can certainly do it yourself. Below are the instructions I give my patients to help them go into a deep relaxed state. The skill builds over time, so it is important to practice this exercise to gain mastery. Set aside two 15-minute periods a day and go through the following five steps.



SELF-HYPNOSIS, GUIDED IMAGERY, AND PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION: A HEALING PRACTICE

1. Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet on the floor and your hands in your lap. Pick a spot on the opposite wall that is a little bit above your eye level. Stare at the spot. As you do, slowly count to 20. Notice that your eyelids soon begin to feel heavy, as if they want to close. Let them. In fact, even if they don't feel as if they want to close, slowly lower them as you get to 20.

2. Take a deep breath, as deep as you can, and very slowly exhale. Repeat the deep breath and slow exhale three times. With each in-breath, imagine taking in peace and calmness, and with each out-breath, blow out all the tension—all the things getting in the way of your relaxing. By this time, you'll notice a calm come over you.
3. Squeeze the muscles in your eyelids, closing your eyes as tightly as you can. Then slowly let the muscles in your eyelids relax. Imagine that relaxation slowly spreading, like a warm, penetrating oil, from the muscles in your eyelids to the muscles in your face—down your neck, into your shoulders and arms, into your chest, and throughout the rest of your body. The muscles will take the cue from your eyelids and relax progressively all the way down to the bottoms of your feet.
4. When all the tension has left your body, imagine yourself at the top of an escalator. Step on the escalator and ride down, counting backward from 10. By the time you reach the bottom, you'll be very relaxed.
5. Enjoy the tranquility for several moments. Then get back on the escalator riding up, counting to 10 as you go. When you get to 10, open your eyes, feeling relaxed, refreshed, and wide awake.

To make these steps easy to remember, think of the following words:

- Focus (focus on the spot)
- Breathe (slow, deep breaths)
- Relax (progressive muscle relaxation)
- Down (ride down the escalator)
- Up (ride up the escalator and open your eyes)

If you have trouble remembering these steps, you may want to record them as you read them aloud and then do the exercise as you listen to the audio.

Allow yourself plenty of time to do this. Some people become so relaxed that they fall asleep for several minutes. If that happens, don't worry. It's a good sign—you're really relaxed!



ADD VISUAL IMAGERY TO ENVISION A BETTER LIFE

When you've practiced this technique a few times, add the following steps:

Choose a haven—a place where you feel comfortable and that you can imagine with all your senses. I usually “go” to the beach. I can see the ocean, feel the sand between my toes and the warm sun and breeze on my skin, smell the salt air and taste it faintly on my tongue, and hear the seagulls, the waves, and children playing. Your haven can be any real or imaginary place where you’d like to spend time.

After you reach the bottom of the escalator, use all your senses to imagine yourself in your special haven. Stay for several minutes. This is where the fun starts and where your mind becomes ripe for change.

Begin to experience yourself—not as you currently are, but as you *want* to be. Plan on spending at least 20 minutes a day on this refueling, life-changing exercise. You’ll be amazed at the results.

During each session, choose one goal to work on. Stay with that goal until you can imagine yourself reaching it, going through each of the steps required to attain it. If your goal is to own your own business, for example, use all your senses to imagine yourself in that business. See the office or shop. Interact with your customers. Smell the environment around you. Feel your desk. Sip a cup of coffee in your chair, savoring the taste and aroma. Experience your dream. Make it real in your imagination, thereby beginning to make it real in your life. Or, if your goal is to improve your relationship with your spouse, friend, or children, imagine the relationship as you want it to be, in as much detail as you can. The way to improve your expectations is to first imagine the situation as you want it to be instead of imagining the worst, as you likely have been doing.

IT EVEN WORKS AT HOME

Years ago, on the Fourth of July, we had a party at our house. As the fireworks started outdoors, our then-eight-year-old daughter, Chloe, was creating her own fireworks in our kitchen. My wife, Tana, had created a new dessert for the party, a combination of coconut and almond butter. Chloe decided to heat it up. When she took it out of the microwave, she tested it with her finger—and that’s when the screaming started. It was very hot, and the concoction stuck to her finger. She first tried to shake it off, then wiped it off with a towel and stuck her finger in her mouth. Next, she put her hand in ice water, then aloe gel, and then ice cubes. The pain and frustration escalated as she unraveled, and the automatic negative thoughts (ANTs; see chapter 5) started to take over. “I’m so stupid,” she said. “Why did I do that?” Her mother gave her ibuprofen for the pain and started putting her to bed, but Chloe was not calming down.

The negative thoughts were now coming in droves. “I can’t do this. It’s too much. I can’t take it. I’m so stupid. I can’t believe I did it. I wish I could go back and do it over.”

Tana tried to distract Chloe by reading to her, but it didn’t work. She then prayed with her, but Chloe couldn’t focus. Nothing worked, so Tana walked into my office and said I needed to help.

I sat on Chloe’s bed and assessed the situation. As I had done for many patients in the hospital, I used a simple hypnotic trance to calm her. Using the outline above, I had her focus on a spot on the wall, close her eyes, start to relax her body, and slow her breathing. I then asked her to imagine walking down a flight of stairs as I counted backward from 10. Next I had her imagine going to a special park that she imagined with all of her senses, where it was safe and she was with her mother and friends. I had her imagine going into a warm pool. The water had special healing powers that soothed and helped her finger, taking away the pain. The water also helped to calm her thoughts and her body. She did not need to be so hard on herself. We all make mistakes. Being angry only made the pain worse.

Chloe became visibly more relaxed and started to drift off to sleep. The park and special healing pool was a place she could go back to anytime she was upset or needed to calm down. Then she fell asleep. Quietly, we left her room, wondering how she would do. We did not see her until the next morning, and even though she had a small blister on her finger, she said it didn’t hurt and all was well. “Everyone makes mistakes,” she said. “I guess that was one of mine. I won’t do it again.” This technique is very powerful—with adults and with children, too.

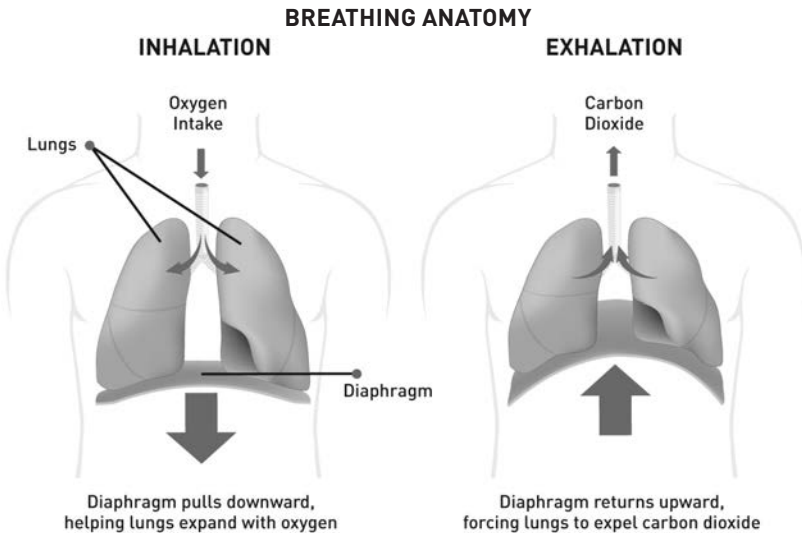
Technique #2: Master diaphragmatic breathing.

In the chapter’s opening story, the first thing I did with Beth was help her to slow her breathing, so she could get more oxygen to her brain. Diaphragmatic breathing is a core biofeedback technique to help you feel better fast. It is simple to teach and, once practiced, simple to implement and maintain. Like brain activity, breathing is essential to life and involved in everything you do. Breathing delivers oxygen from the atmosphere into your lungs, where your bloodstream picks it up and takes it to all of the cells in your body so that they can function properly. Breathing also allows you to eliminate waste products, such as carbon dioxide, which can cause feelings of disorientation and panic. Brain cells are particularly sensitive to oxygen; within four minutes of being deprived of it, they start to die. Slight changes in oxygen content in the brain can alter the way you feel and behave.

When someone gets upset, angry, or anxious, their breathing becomes shallow and fast (see the “Breathing Anatomy” diagram below). This causes the oxygen in an angry person’s blood to decrease, while toxic carbon dioxide increases. Subsequently, the oxygen/carbon dioxide balance is upset, causing irritability, impulsiveness, confusion, and bad decision-making.

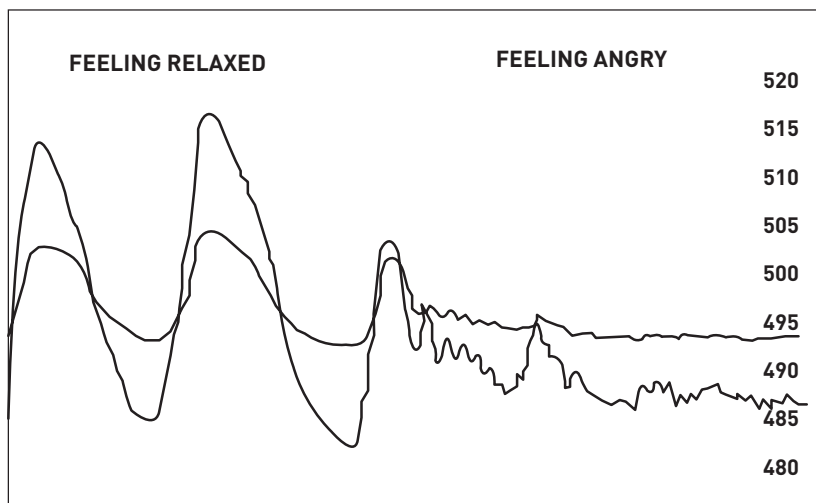
Learning how to direct and control your breathing has several immediate benefits. It calms the amygdala (part of the emotional brain), counteracts the fight-or-flight response, relaxes muscles, warms hands, and regulates the heart’s rhythms. I often teach patients to become experts at breathing slowly, deeply, and from their bellies. If you watch a baby or a puppy, you will notice that they breathe almost solely with their bellies—the most efficient way to breathe.

Expanding your belly when you inhale flattens the diaphragm, pulling the lungs downward and increasing the amount of air available to your lungs and body. Pulling your belly in when you exhale causes the diaphragm to push the air out of your lungs, allowing for a more fully exhaled breath, which once again encourages deep breathing. In biofeedback, patients are taught to breathe with their bellies by watching their breathing pattern on the computer screen. In 20 to 30 minutes, most people can learn how to change their breathing patterns, which relaxes them and gives them better control over how they feel and behave.



The diaphragm, a bell-shaped muscle, separates the chest cavity from the abdomen. Many people never flatten the diaphragm when they inhale, and thus with each breath they have less access to their own lung capacity and have to work harder. By moving your belly out when you inhale, you flatten the diaphragm, significantly increase lung capacity, and calm all body systems.

BREATHING DURING ANGER



The large waveform is a measurement of abdominal or belly breathing, by a strain gauge attached around the belly; the smaller waveform is a measurement of chest breathing, by a strain gauge attached around the upper chest. At rest, this person breathes mostly with his belly (a good pattern), but when he thinks about an angry situation his breathing pattern deteriorates, markedly decreasing the oxygen to his brain (common to anger outbursts). No wonder people who have anger outbursts often seem irrational!

Controlled diaphragmatic breathing has been shown to improve focus and lower anxiety, stress, negative feelings, and cortisol;¹⁵ decrease depression¹⁶ and asthma;¹⁷ reduce obesity in children,¹⁸ pain,¹⁹ blood pressure,²⁰ motion sickness,²¹ and seizure frequency;²² and boost the quality of life in heart failure patients.²³

Technique #3: Become expert at warming your hands with your mind.

Take a moment to focus on your hands, feeling their energy and temperature. When you intentionally learn how to warm your hands with your brain by directing your thoughts to warming images (such as holding your palms up in front of a fire), your body goes into a relaxed state. Scientific research has shown that using this technique can be helpful for anxiety,²⁴ migraine headaches in both children²⁵ and adults,²⁶ blood pressure,²⁷ and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).²⁸ New evidence shows that when you hold something warm, such as a warm hand, you are more trusting and giving, and you feel closer to others. Cold hands have the opposite effect.

Researchers studied college students to assess how hand temperature

Breathing Techniques to Help You Calm Down Fast

:05
MINUTES **Breathing Technique #1:** While few people have access to sophisticated biofeedback equipment, these simple techniques can be effective for everyone. Try the following exercise right now: Lie on your back and place a small book on your belly. When you inhale, make the book rise by expanding your belly; when you exhale, pull your belly in, which will lower the book. Shifting the energy of breathing lower in your body—from your upper chest into your abdomen—will help you feel more relaxed and in better control of yourself almost instantaneously. Practice this for five minutes every day until it feels natural. You can use this breathing technique to gain greater focus and control over your temper. It is easy to learn, and it can also help with sleep and anxiety issues.


:02-03
MINUTES **Breathing Technique #2:** Whenever you feel anxious, mad, or tense, take a deep breath, hold it for one or two seconds, and then slowly exhale for about five seconds. Then take another deep breath, as deep as you can, hold it for one to two seconds, and again slowly exhale. Do this about 10 times, and odds are that you will start to feel very relaxed, if not a little sleepy. I have used this technique myself for 30 years whenever I feel anxious, angry, or stressed, or when I have trouble falling asleep. It sounds so simple, but breathing is essential to life. When we slow down and become more efficient with our breathing, most things seem better.

affects emotions.²⁹ They found that holding warm things may actually make people view others more favorably and may also make them more generous. In one study, a tester met each of the 41 participants in the lobby of the building where the tests were being conducted. In the elevator on the way up, the tester casually asked the participant to hold his cup of coffee while he recorded some information on his clipboard. The participant did not know that this request was part of the experiment. Half the participants were asked

to hold a cup of warm coffee, and half were asked to hold a cup of iced coffee. Once in the testing room, participants were given a packet of information on an unknown person and then asked to evaluate the person's personality using a questionnaire. Participants who had held the warm coffee were much more likely to score the unknown person as warmer than those who had held the iced coffee.

In a second study by the same researchers, participants were asked to hold either a hot or a cold therapeutic pad. Participants thought their role was to evaluate the product. After the "test," they were offered a reward for themselves or a treat for a friend. The people who had held the warm pad were more likely to choose the treat for a friend. Dr. John Bargh, coauthor of the study, said, "It appears that the effect of physical temperature is not just on how we see others, it affects our own behavior as well. Physical warmth can make us see others as warmer people, but also cause us to be warmer—more generous and trusting—as well." Coauthor Dr. Lawrence Williams said, "At a board meeting, for instance, being willing to reach out and touch another human being, to share their hand, those experiences do matter although we may not always be aware of them."³⁰ These studies are striking because we know that when our hands are cold, we are more likely to be anxious and fearful, traits that decrease intimacy and closeness to others.

Bring Warmth to Intimate Relationships

 To develop heartfelt closeness, when you hold your partner's hand, imagine warm, loving energy going from your hand to his or hers. With each exhalation send warm, intentional thoughts of love and gratitude. Do this just a few times a day, and soon you will begin to notice a positive difference in your relationship.

MINUTES

Visualizing warmth, especially in your hands, is another tool to help you feel better fast and counteract the fight-or-flight response. I've found that teaching patients to warm their hands calms down their bodies and minds just as effectively as prescription drugs. Hand warming elicits an immediate relaxation response. We know this because biofeedback instruments allow

us to measure hand temperature and then teach people how to warm their hands. Interestingly, children are better at this than adults because kids readily believe they have power over their bodies, whereas adults do not.

When my daughter Breanne was eight years old, she could increase her hand temperature by up to 20 degrees. She was so good at it, I brought her along with me when I did a biofeedback lecture to physicians at a Northern California hospital. In front of 30 physicians, I had her demonstrate her amazing skill. However, for the first three minutes her hands did nothing but get ice cold, because she felt such performance anxiety. In those few minutes I was horrified, feeling like a terrible father who was exploiting his daughter to be important in front of his colleagues. Then I whispered in her ear that she should close her eyes, take a deep breath, and imagine her hands in the warm sand at the beach (the image that worked best for her). Over the next seven minutes, her hands warmed 18 degrees. The doctors were amazed, she was so happy with herself, and I was relieved that I had not scarred her for life.

How can you warm your hands with your mind? You do it with diaphragmatic breathing and the visualization that works for you. For some, like Breanne, it's imagining putting your hands in warm sand at the beach. For others, it's thinking about holding a loved one's hand or touching their warm skin. For still others, it's visualizing holding a warm, furry kitten or puppy.



03-04 Hand-Warming Technique. Close your eyes and hold out your hands, palms down, and visualize a campfire in front of you. Focus. Think heat. You can hear the fire crackle, smell the aroma of fresh-cut wood burning, see the sparks float up into the sky. Now feel the soothing heat as it penetrates the surface of your skin and goes deep to warm your hands. Picture this as you breathe deeply, and count slowly to 20. Did you feel an increase in warmth? Relaxation? Did you find you started to hold your hands closer as if there were actually a fire in front of you? Practice this technique for a few minutes every day, and you'll find you get to the relaxation response more easily and faster over time. Find the hand-warming images that work for you, and you will reset your nervous system to be more relaxed and counteract your stress response. You can buy temperature sensors online (under brand names Biodots, Stress Cards, and Stress Sheets) to get feedback on your progress.

13 Hand-Warming Images

1. Holding someone's warm hand or touching their warm skin
 2. Visualizing (in great detail) someone you appreciate
 3. Putting your hands in warm sand at the beach
 4. Taking a hot bath or shower
 5. Sitting in a sauna
 6. Cuddling a baby
 7. Cuddling a warm, furry puppy or kitten
 8. Holding a warm cup of tea or sugar-free cocoa
 9. Holding your hands in front of a fire
 10. Wearing warm gloves
 11. Being wrapped in a warm towel
 12. Getting a massage with warm oil
 13. Holding a hot potato while wearing warm gloves
-

Technique #4: Pray and/or practice meditation (especially Loving-Kindness Meditation).

Focusing on your breathing, a beautiful outdoor scene, or Scripture for just five to ten minutes a day is a simple yet powerful way to improve your life. Prayer and meditation have been found to calm stress; improve focus, mood, and memory; and enhance prefrontal cortex function to help you make better decisions. What's more, meditation benefits your heart and blood pressure, digestion, and immune system, as well as improving executive function and emotional control and reducing feelings of anxiety, depression, and irritability.³¹

There are many effective techniques, including reading, memorizing, or meditating on Scripture; writing out a personal prayer; reading classic spiritual writings; or focusing on gratitude. One of my personal favorite forms of meditation is called Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM), which is intended to develop feelings of goodwill and warmth toward others. It has been found to quickly increase positive emotions and decrease negative ones,³² decrease pain³³ and migraine headaches,³⁴ reduce symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder³⁵ and social prejudice,³⁶ increase gray matter in the emotional processing areas of the brain,³⁷ and boost social connectedness.³⁸ Here's how to start to practice:



Loving-Kindness Meditation. Sit in a comfortable and relaxed position and close your eyes. Take two or three deep breaths, taking twice as long to exhale as inhale. Let any worries or concerns drift away, and feel your breath moving through the area around your heart. As you sit, quietly or silently repeat the following or similar phrases:

May I be safe and secure.
 May I be healthy and strong.
 May I be happy and purposeful.
 May I be at peace.

Let the intentions expressed in these phrases sink in as you repeat them. Allow the feelings to grow deeper.

After a few repetitions, direct the phrases to someone you feel grateful for or someone who has helped you:

May you be safe and secure.
 May you be healthy and strong.
 May you be happy and purposeful.
 May you be at peace.

Next, visualize someone you feel neutral about. Choose among people you neither like nor dislike, and repeat the phrases.

Now visualize someone you don't like or with whom you are having a hard time, and repeat the phrases with that person in mind. Kids who are being teased or bullied at school often feel quite empowered when they send love to the people who are making them miserable.

Finally, direct the phrases more broadly: *May everyone be safe and secure.*

You can do this for up to 30 minutes; it is up to you.

Technique #5: Create your emotional rescue playlist.

Music can soothe, inspire, improve your mood, and help you focus. It is important in every known culture on earth, with ancient roots extending back thousands of years.³⁹ After evaluating more than 800 people, researchers have found that people listen to music to regulate their energy and mood, to achieve self-awareness, and to improve social bonds. Music provides social cement—think of work and war songs, lullabies, and national anthems.⁴⁰ In his powerful book *The Secret Language of the Heart*, Barry Goldstein reviewed the neuroscientific properties of music. He suggested that music stimulates emotional circuits in

the brain⁴¹ and releases oxytocin, the “cuddle hormone,” which can enhance bonding, trust, and relationships.⁴² He wrote, “Listening to music can create peak emotions, which increase the amount of dopamine, a specific neurotransmitter that is produced in the brain and helps control the brain’s reward and pleasure centers. . . . Music was used to assist patients with severe brain injuries in recalling personal memories. The music helped the patients to reconnect to memories they previously could not access.”⁴³ Be aware, however, that music you strongly like or dislike may impair your focus.⁴⁴

Based on the concept of entrainment, which means your brain picks up the rhythm of your environment, you can manipulate your mind with the music you choose. In a fascinating study, research subjects rated Mozart’s Sonata for Two Pianos (K. 448) and Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata as happy and sad, respectively.⁴⁵ Listening to happy music (Mozart’s piece) increased activity in the brain’s left hemisphere, associated with happiness and motivation, and decreased activity in the right hemisphere, often associated with anxiety and negativity. Beethoven’s piece did the opposite. According to research published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, you can improve your mood and boost your overall happiness in just two weeks, simply by having the intention of being happier and by listening to specific mood-boosting music, such as Aaron Copland’s *Rodeo*, for 12 minutes a day.⁴⁶ Having only the intention to be happier was not as effective. Listening to happy instrumental music (versus music with lyrics) was more powerful in activating the limbic or emotional circuits of the brain.⁴⁷

Create your own emotional rescue playlist to boost your mood quickly. Research shows it can be effective to start with musical pieces you love. If you’re not sure where to start, try some of these pieces, which have been shown through research to boost mood.

RESEARCH-BASED FEEL BETTER FAST MUSIC



Without lyrics (words can be distracting⁴⁸):

Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major, third movement (K. 448) – Mozart (~ 6 min.)

“Clair de Lune” – Debussy (~ 5 min.)

“Adagio for Strings” – Samuel Barber (~ 8 min.)

Piano Sonata no. 17 in D Minor (“The Tempest”) – Beethoven (~ 25 min.)

“First Breath after Coma” – Explosions in the Sky (9:33 min.)

“Adagio for Strings” – Tĭesto (9:34 min. original; 7:23 min. album version)

- “Fanfare for the Common Man” – Aaron Copland (~ 4 min.)
- “Weightless” – Marconi Union (8:09 min.)
- “Flotus” – Flying Lotus (3:27 min.)
- “Lost in Thought” – Jon Hopkins (6:16 min.)
- “The Soundmaker” – Rodrigo y Gabriela (4:54 min.)
- “See” – Tycho (5:18 min.)
- “Spectre” – Tycho (3:47 min.)

Add nature sounds (your own recordings or downloads of favorites) to boost mood and focus.⁴⁹

:02-05
MINUTES

With lyrics:⁵⁰

- “Good Vibrations” – The Beach Boys (3:16 min.)
- “Don’t Stop Me Now” – Queen (3:36 min.)
- “Uptown Girl” – Billy Joel (3:23 min.)
- “Dancing Queen” – ABBA (3:45 min.)
- “Eye of the Tiger” – Survivor (4:11 min.)
- “I’m a Believer” – The Monkees (2:46 min.)
- “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” – Cyndi Lauper (4:25 min.)
- “Livin’ on a Prayer” – Bon Jovi (4:09 min.)
- “I Will Survive” – Gloria Gaynor (3:11 min.)
- “Walking on Sunshine” – Katrina and the Waves (3:48 min.)

Brain-enhancing music specifically composed by Barry Goldstein to enhance creativity, mood, memory, gratitude, energy, focus, motivation, and inspiration can be found at www.mybrainfitlife.com. Treat your brain and listen often.

Technique #6: Flood your five senses with positivity.

The brain senses the world. If you can change the inputs, you can often quickly change how you feel.

:03-25
MINUTES

Hearing—Music can help to optimize your state of being, as we have just seen.

:20-60
MINUTES

Touch—Positive touch is powerful. Getting a hug, a massage, acupuncture, or acupressure or spending time in a sauna can improve mood.

- Massage has been shown to improve pain, mood, and anxiety in fibromyalgia patients;⁵¹ mood and pain in cancer patients;⁵² and mood after open-heart surgery.⁵³ It has also been shown to improve mood and behavior in students with ADHD.⁵⁴ (30–60 min.)
- Acupuncture and acupressure can help with premenstrual syndrome (PMS),⁵⁵ depression,⁵⁶ anxiety and anger,⁵⁷ and pain.⁵⁸ (60 min.)
- Saunas have been shown to enhance mood after just one session,⁵⁹ increase endorphins (feel-good chemicals),⁶⁰ and decrease the risk of Alzheimer's disease.⁶¹ (20 min.)

TINY HABITS THAT CAN HELP YOU FEEL BETTER FAST—AND LEAD TO BIG CHANGES



Each of these habits takes just a few minutes. They are anchored to something you do (or think or feel) so that they are more likely to become automatic. Once you do the behaviors you want, find a way to make yourself feel good about them—draw a happy face, pump your fist, or do whatever feels natural. Emotion helps the brain to remember.

1. Whenever I feel anxious or stressed, I will take three deep belly breaths and imagine a safe haven or place that relaxes me.
2. When I hold my partner's or child's hand, I will think of warmth radiating between our hands.
3. When I start to feel irritated, I will look at some photos of nature.
4. When I feel upset, I will put on the playlist I developed to feel happy.
5. Before I go to bed, I will pray or do a short Loving-Kindness Meditation.

:05 MINUTES *Smell*—Certain scents are known to have positive effects on how we feel, especially lavender oil (for anxiety,⁶² mood,⁶³ sleep,⁶⁴ and migraine headaches⁶⁵), rose oil,⁶⁶ and chamomile.⁶⁷

:05 MINUTES *Sight*—Soothing images can impact your mood. Images of nature⁶⁸ and fractals (never-ending patterns)⁶⁹ can soothe stress. In one study, people who looked at real plants or posters of plants experienced less stress while waiting for medical procedures.⁷⁰

:05 MINUTES *Taste*—Flavoring food with cinnamon, saffron, mint, sage, or nutmeg has been shown to enhance mood.⁷¹

Find fun ways to put this all together to change your state of mind: Take a sauna while listening to “Good Vibrations” and watching scenes of the ocean, all with the scent of lavender or rose oil in the air and while sipping on a cinnamon almond-milk cappuccino.

These six techniques are effective ways to help you feel better fast when you’re anxious or upset. Come back to them anytime you need to regain control over your mind and body.

SIX BRAIN-BASED TECHNIQUES TO REGAIN CONTROL OVER YOUR MIND AND BODY

1. Use hypnosis, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation to go into a deep, relaxed state.
2. Master diaphragmatic breathing.
3. Become expert at warming your hands with your mind.
4. Pray and/or practice meditation (especially Loving-Kindness Meditation).
5. Create your emotional rescue playlist.
6. Flood your five senses with positivity.

You can listen to hypnosis audios, breathing games, and meditations at www.brainfitlife.com.