

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

CHANGE YOUR BRAIN EVERY DAY



#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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**TYNDALE
REFRESH™**

Think Well. Live Well. Be Well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Introduction

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

As an example, meet my friend—journalist and media personality Leeza Gibbons. I got to know Leeza after being on her nationally syndicated television show in 1999 when my book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* was first published. She's brilliant, purposeful, and has a smile that brightens any room. We became friends after I'd been on her show several times. In getting to know her, I found out her mother and grandmother both died with Alzheimer's disease, which was incredibly stressful for them and for Leeza's family. Given that I knew that Alzheimer's disease runs in families and shows negative brain changes decades before people have any symptoms, I encouraged Leeza to come see

me to get her brain scanned. At Amen Clinics we do a brain imaging study called SPECT that looks at blood flow and activity patterns; it is one of the best studies to evaluate the risk for Alzheimer’s disease.

Initially, Leeza was hesitant to get scanned. Many people are afraid to know if their brains may be headed for trouble. But I told her, “If you knew a train was going to hit you, wouldn’t you at least want to try to get out of the way?” After going through a stressful time, Leeza came to see me, and her SPECT scan showed several areas of very low blood flow. Her brain was clearly headed for trouble. Leeza took the results seriously and did everything I asked, which is all in the daily practices of this book. Ten years later, her brain was dramatically healthier, which is not what typically happens with age. The images of her scans below tell a story—a story of hope. *You are not stuck with the brain you have. With the right guidance you can make it better, and I can prove it.*



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

BRAIN AND MENTAL HEALTH ARE DAILY PRACTICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In my book *The End of Mental Illness*, I asked myself, if I were an evil ruler and wanted to increase the incidence of mental illness, what I would do? Society has a large impact on your brain and mind. I also asked, if I were a good ruler and wanted to decrease mental illness, what strategies I would employ? You will find dozens of good ruler versus evil ruler strategies in this book so you know how to avoid the traps society lays for us.

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

It's up to you how fast you go through this book, but I recommend you just read a page a day. It'll only take a few minutes, but over time it'll change your life as you learn to think about and practice brain and mental health every day for a year. Just as I encourage my patients to lose weight

slowly, so they develop the lifestyle habits that will help them stay trim and healthy for the rest of their lives, establishing these brain and mental health habits one at a time will help them last.

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

[1] B. J. Fogg, *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 4.

DAY 1

Your Brain Creates Your Mind

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

In 2020, Justin Bieber released his docuseries *Seasons*, where he told the world I've been his doctor. [\[1\]](#) Fame is very hard on the brain, and it happened to Justin so early and so intensely that I'm happy he survived and is now an amazing young man. Before Justin came to see me, he had been diagnosed by another physician with bipolar disorder based on his symptoms alone, but his SPECT scan showed his brain had been hurt. I remember one day when he came into my office and said, "I think I understand what you've been trying to tell me. My brain is an organ just like my heart is an organ. If you told me I had heart disease, I would do everything you said. I am going to do what you say." By focusing on both brain and mental health together, he has continued to do well.

Your brain *is* an organ, just like your heart, lungs, and kidneys are organs. Yet most people who see cardiologists have never had a heart attack; instead, they are there to prevent them. I anticipate a day when psychiatrists will act in a similar way, when they will know the brain's risk

factors (see the BRIGHT MINDS risk factors on days 7, 9, and 39–104) and address each of them in their patients as soon as possible. To have a better mind, you must first work to optimize the physical functioning of your brain.

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

[1] Justin Bieber, “The Dark Season—Justin Bieber: Seasons,” February 3, 2020, in *Seasons*, video, 14:49, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz2-nYKCFIo>; also see Amen Clinics, “How Justin Bieber Is Using Brain Science to Fight Depression,” Resources, blog, February 3, 2020, <https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/how-justin-bieber-is-using-brain-science-to-fight-depression/>.