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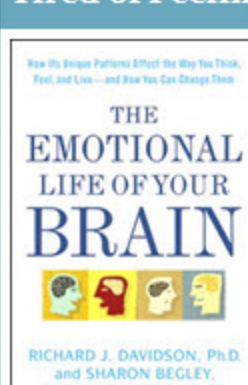


## FAMILY MEDICINE

Greetings!

There's some groundbreaking medical information in this edition of the newsletter. While changes to our physical, mental or spiritual health don't always come easy, the news is that it that there is new information that offers new hope for the possibility of positive change.

### Tired of Feeling Bad? There Are New Answers



During the last month I've been telling many of our patients about some incredible research that has been conducted over the last 3 decades on how our brains are rather plastic - they can change. And with the help of realtime f(functional)MRI we can now show that the brain of an optimistic person is not only different from that of a pessimist but that we can actually learn how to train our brain to change. The article that appeared in Newsweek about a month ago entitled [Tired of Feeling Bad](#) describes in detail one particular emotional trait - resilience. The article is fascinating and opened my eyes to new potential ways to help my patients and myself reach a more fulfilling life.

To summarize, Dr. Davidson has demonstrated through the use of EEG and fMRI that there are 6 core emotional traits. They are Resilience (fast to recover from adversity vs. slow to recover); Outlook (optimism vs. pessimism); Socially Intuitive vs. Puzzled; Self-Awareness vs. Self-Opaque; Sensitivity to Context (tuned in vs. tuned out); Attention (focused vs. unfocused). We all lie somewhere along a spectrum for each of these traits. He states (but hasn't proven) that the mixture of these traits comprises our overall emotional style. A particular pole of of these traits should not be deemed as necessarily bad or good. For example, being self-aware would typically be viewed as a useful trait, but if you are overly aware of bodily sensations you are experiencing, it could prove to be overwhelming and even lead to an anxiety attack.

Resilience is that ability to bounce back from adversity. It could be as serious as the death of a loved one or as minor as a friend cancelling out on going out to the movies. Most people will be crushed by the death of a someone close, but a resilient person would be back on her feet more quickly than a person who fell on the slow-to-recover end of the spectrum. A fast-to-recover person whose friend backs out on them might just go to the movies themselves or find another friend to go with them. The slow-to-recover person may brood about why this happened and perhaps allow this to bug them even the next day.

The really interesting aspect of the research regarding resilience is that the fMRI will show that those who are fast-to-recover have increased brain activity in their left prefrontal cortex. And the really cool thing about this is that you can do certain mental exercises to train your brain to increase the activity in your left prefrontal cortex and actually develop more emotional resilience. For those of us who are loathe to bathing every cell in our bodies with drugs in order to affect our mood, this is great news.

One specific technique Dr. Davidson discusses in the book, behavioral activation therapy, is as effective as medication in treating depression. One hallmark of depression is that depressed people cannot hold on to a good feeling for very long. They will laugh at a joke just like a normal person and the same regions of the brain will light up on fMRI in both groups. With behavioral activation therapy, the depressed individual sets a schedule up to actually do the things that bring them joy. And by stimulating the brain with positive feelings multiple times during the week, the 'brush fires' can actually catch and move the brain into a nondepressed state. Again, the success of this approach is documented not only by the patient's mood but by fMRI.

Dr. Davidson also demonstrates that different types of meditation can target particular parts of our brain that are involved in specific emotional traits. If you do purchase the book (available in audio too) you can choose to skip over parts that you have little interest in and head toward the end which focuses on treatment. In addition, I'm working on meditation programs that can be easily downloaded and are inexpensive. If after perusing the article or the book you'd like to come in to talk about what aspects of your emotional life you'd like to change, I'd love to chat. As always, you can email me with general questions you might have.

Deborah

### Running the Marathon for Health Justice



After a 30 year hiatus, I decided to run the Boston Marathon (and actually train for it). I'm most interested in making it to the finish line intact, so I will not be breaking any land speed records and hopefully not any bones. The impetus for my running the marathon is to promote the values of the Occupy Boston working group that I've been involved with for the last 6 months- [HealthJusticeBoston.org](#)

Most of us that choose a career in healthcare do so because we really care about people. As a physician or nurse practitioner, we usually are helping people one at a time, and I get immense satisfaction from having that opportunity. Yet there is a lot of suffering at home and around the world due to issues that don't seem directly connected to healthcare. Many of them are listed in our banner above. My hope is that some day more people will come to realize that we are in this life together. Working toward a goals of adequate housing for all; clean air and water; adequate public transportation; a living wage; and the end to war will raise everyone's quality of life. The media doesn't seem to find this concept interesting enough.

So come and cheer me on this coming Monday April 16. I will be running as a 'bandit' - no number and thus will certainly be in the back of the pack- and can use all the support I can get.

Deborah

### Building Muscle May Ramp Up Fat Burning



Scientists at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute have isolated a muscle hormone which may be responsible for the many health benefits of exercise. The scientists have named the hormone irisin after the Greek messenger Goddess, Iris.

Irisin levels rise when people exercise. One effect of this is to convert white fat, the common type of fat that everyone knows too well, into brown fat. While white fat is used to store energy (calories), brown fat seems to be more involved in burning it. Irisin also improves glucose tolerance and causes insulin levels to rise, suggesting that it may be helpful in treating diabetes.

The above summary of a study on irisin, that appeared in the Atlantic magazine in January of this year, in my mind solidifies what we have learned about exercise and health in recent years. Increased muscle mass is associated with better handling of blood sugar. Both aerobic exercise and weight lifting reduces the risk of heart disease. The benefits of weight training are indeed additive to that of aerobic exercise (running, biking, swimming, etc.)

I have been 'harping' on the benefits of proper eating for a long time too. Leptin is a hormone produced by fat and is critical for proper energy balance. Eating an anti-inflammatory diet (roughly the Mediterranean Diet) that is rich in fruit, green leafy vegetables, nuts, omega -3 fats, minimal red meat and poultry is important in getting leptin to work for you. A huge Health and Nutrition Conference is going on during Marathon week, but I've already ordered the DVDs. So I will be attempting to bring you up to date on the latest in tasty and health morsels in the near future.

Deborah

We recently added the email option to the Patient Portal. This option allows patients and practitioners a direct line of communication via a secure email. If you are not currently web-enabled, please call us and ask to activate your account. Not only will you be able to email your practitioner with questions and comments, but you will be able to view your lab results, diagnostic imaging reports, medical summary, appointment history, and visit summaries.

We hope to add more features in the coming months. Stay tuned!

**Yours in Health,**

Deborah Bershel, M.D. and Staff  
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