



BRAIN TRAINING

Ultimate Brain Training Strategies
For Memory Improvement, Concentration,
Mental Clarity, Neuroplasticity,
and Mind Power

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Introduction

Thank you for downloading this book, entitled “Brain Training: Ultimate Brain Training Strategies for Memory Improvement, Concentration, Neuroplasticity, and Mind Power.”

Brain training has been in the news for the past couple of decades and, although the experts are still conducting research into what extent training your brain can ward off Alzheimer’s and other age-related illnesses, there has largely been a positive link made between staying mentally alert and brain training.

People are often confused about brain training and exactly what it means. Many presume that they need to purchase expensive tools – and certainly the manufacturers of such tools are happy for you to think that way because they want you to purchase their goods.

They may use complicated rhetoric to impress you. The truth is that there are plenty of ways that you can train your brain without spending a fortune; language learning is just one of them.

What you need to do is to work out what you want to improve in your life. If you need to improve your memory, there are methods that you can use to do so; the same goes for concentration, critical thinking and reasoning, as well as increasing the speed at which you can complete tasks.

If you have downloaded this book, you are probably interested in finding out how you can train your brain to enable to make the most of your life.

This book will talk you through how brain training affects the brain, at least as far as current research allows us to know, and simple strategies that you can use to train your brain without spending a fortune on complicated computer programs and other tools.

Chapter 1

What is Brain Training?

Put simply, brain training is a form of exercise for the brain, equivalent to exercise for the body. The phrase ‘use it or lose it’ is often used to refer to people who have retired, suggesting that if they find ways to stimulate their brains, they will remain mentally alert for longer.

However, scientists are now recommending that people start to find ways of training their brains at much younger ages. If your brain is fit, then you will be able to complete mental and physical tasks more competently and efficiently, allowing you to have improved relationships and to be able to cope better with life in general.

The science behind Brain training

Neuroplasticity is a major key word when it comes to brain training. Neuroplasticity refers to the fact that your brain is 'plastic'; it can reorganize itself throughout your life by forming new neural connections in response to stimulation from experience and learning.

This means that neurons can adjust their function as necessary, so that if you receive an injury to the brain, or have an illness that affects your brain, the parts of the brain that aren't affected can take over to make up for the loss.

However, in order to have a healthy brain, you need to have the ability to create new neurons, as well as good connections between neurons. Neurons are basically nerve cells that are the building blocks of the entire nervous system.

They are similar to other cells throughout the body, but they have one major difference, which is in their ability to communicate information throughout the body.

There are different types of neurons in the body. Sensory neurons are the ones that communicate information to the brain, whereas motor neurons communicate information to the muscles in the body and interneurons communicate information between different neurons.

Initially, it was believed that neurons in the brain were only developed during the embryonic stage and that, once born, a human being was stuck

with the number of brain cells that they had.

When Joseph Altman put forward research in the 1960s that appeared to refute this, people laughed at him. It is now widely believed that humans can indeed create new neurons in the brain; this process is called neurogenesis.

In order for neurogenesis to take place, it is necessary to have good health in general and to have the right environment – in other words, you need to keep your brain active in order to grow more cells.

The fact that it is widely accepted that neurogenesis does exist in adults has revolutionized the way that scientists think about the brain. For example, it is believed that neurogenesis takes place predominantly in the hippocampus and that depression results from hippocampal shrinkage; certainly many of the medications prescribed for depression aim to stimulate neurogenesis in the hippocampus.

Many scientists believe that neurogenesis means that there are ways of repairing the brain. However, research is still ongoing and there are still a lot of critics who don't think that brain repair is possible.

So can your Brain be trained?

Whether your brain can be repaired or not really depends on the scientific stance that you take. However, there is more and more evidence that mental and physical stimulation can result in better memory, concentration and speed at completing tasks. That means that there is every reason to keep your brain active by training it in different ways.

Scientists, such as Jyee Hyung Kim, a neuroscientist from the Florey Institute in Australia, are also quick to point out that brain training is not going to enlarge your brain, or make you more intelligent than you already are. What it means is that you should be able to use the brain that you already have to its greatest effect.

Brain training and Dementia

Brain training is commonly mentioned in conjunction with dementia. There is ongoing research into whether dementia can be off-set, or even cured, by brain training.

However, the positive link between brain training and increased mental activity gives scientists a lot of hope that it will at least have a positive effect on people who may suffer from dementia in later life. This is heightened by the fact that there seems to be a link between Alzheimer's and lower levels of education.

Although the positive effects of brain training have yet to be scientifically proved, all the evidence that is available to date suggests that there is every reason to start training your brain. It won't change you as a person, nor will it make you more intelligent, but it could just help you get things done a lot more efficiently.

And after all, we all want to be able to find ways of completing our tasks more quickly and accurately so that we can get on with something a bit more fun! So there is really nothing to stop you from training your brain, using tips from the following chapters!

Chapter 2

Strategies to Improve your Memory

If you find that you are constantly forgetting things, the chances are that it is not because you have a poor memory, but that you have so much going on in your life that your brain simply can't handle all the information it has to process. By dealing with this overload of information and using some basic brain training strategies to focus your mind, you should be able to improve your memory in a relatively short space of time.

Deal with Stressful Situations

First of all, you need to deal with any stressful situations in your life. If you are stressed all the time, you may find yourself struggling to get out of bed in the morning, or, because you have so much on your mind, that you're forgetting to do basic things like meeting friends or important work deadlines.

Don't brush issues under the carpet; face them head on. Initially, you could find yourself feeling worse, but in time, you should be able to relax and naturally find that your memory is better.

Take care of your Health

Your memory is bound to be poor if your health is poor. If you don't feel well, you will be concentrating on your body rather than anything going on elsewhere. Make sure you get plenty of sleep, eat well and keep your alcohol levels down.

You probably won't be able to do this if you are stressed, which is why it is important to deal with any sources of stress first. Exercise can also help, particularly if you are stressed. Find something that suits your particular level of fitness.

Try Memory Exercises

There are a number of memory exercises that you can try to improve your memory.

Visualization

Visualization is a great memory exercise. You may have used it at birthday parties as a child when asked to memorize several objects before they are hidden. You would then be asked to repeat the names of the objects for a prize.

You can do this while going about your everyday life. While standing in the supermarket queue, visualize what is in your shopping basket without looking at it. Alternatively, focus on your bedroom at home and force yourself to remember all the things that are in it. In time, you will hopefully become more observant and, as a result, will be less likely to forget things.

Repetition

Another memory exercise to try is to repeat things to yourself. So, on your way to work, repeat the list of things that you need to do. Then when you get into work, deal with each issue before you forget. The same trick can be used when going shopping. Repeat the list of things you need to purchase

and you'll find it easier to remember when you get there. In time, you'll get better at remembering.

You may also find that you are more likely to remember appointments if you repeat things back to the person arranging them; for example, if a friend says, "I'll meet you at four o'clock outside Walmart," repeat it back to her. You are then less likely to forget because you'll be able to hear your own voice in your head.

Computer-based memory games.

New computer-based memory games are constantly coming out, but you don't need to spend a fortune – you will even be able to find plenty of games online that are free. If you do decide that you want to invest in a good memory game, you could try the Posit Science Brain Fitness Program, which will provide you with listening exercises that become increasingly harder.

Use Mnemonic Devices

Mnemonic devices are a great way to remember things if used properly. You probably used them all the time as a child to remember history dates and things like that – the chances are that you still remember them to this day. Mnemonic devices can include the following.

Acronyms

This involves making a word out of the initial letters of things you need to remember. For example, if you need to buy bread, eggs, lemons and licorice, just remember BELL.

Chunk information

If you have a lot of information to remember, for example, a shopping list, or a long list of numbers, make them into logical sub-groups. For example, group together all the ingredients you need for a particular dish to help you remember them, or break down long lists of numbers so that you remember four numbers at a time.

Remember visual images

If you are a visual learner, you may well find that remembering a specific image will help you to remember things. If you need to fill out a particular form, for example, visualize where it is in your office. If you think about the visual image on your way into work, you are less likely to forget it.

Learn a Language

It may seem like a tall order to learn a language just to improve your memory; after all, learning a language is time-consuming if you are to learn it well. However, you don't need to commit a lot of time and resources to learn the basics of a language.

You may even decide to learn just a few words in a number of languages. Doing this with children is a great way to turn language learning into a game and you can even test each other on how much you can remember.

If you have a poor memory, the easiest way to improve it is to deal with any mental and physical health issues first. However, simple exercises to help you remember things can also be of great help, provided that you remember to do them on a daily basis. If you train your brain to do them without thinking too hard about it, you should soon see the benefits.

Chapter 3

Strategies to Improve your Concentration

Now that you've got a better idea of how to improve your memory, it's time to start working on your concentration. Taking care of your health and dealing with things that are stressing you out have already been dealt with in the previous chapter, but it's important to remember that poor health and stress are both major ways of ensuring that you can't concentrate.

If you are constantly worried about your health, aren't sleeping properly and have issues that are constantly nagging at you, it goes without saying that you won't be able to focus on your daily tasks.

Once you have dealt with any health issues, you can start looking at other strategies to improve your concentration.

Exercise

The benefits of exercise are touted everywhere, but it is amazing how few people take the time to get any proper exercise. It can help with a variety of ailments, but Harvard researchers have also shown that exercise can help with cognitive functions, such as memory and concentration.

When you exercise to a moderate level, your brain is stimulated to release a chemical called brain-derived neurotrophic factor. You can't take a pill to release these chemicals, only exercise will do it, so it's time to put your exercise clothes on and get some exercise.

Meditation

If you struggle to concentrate, meditation may be of help. Meditation is the practice of training the mind to become calm and silent. It isn't necessarily easy and many people find it hard to stick at it, but if you do, you will quickly see the benefits.

To meditate, you simply need to find a few minutes in your day when you can be quiet and know that you won't be distracted. Find a position that is comfortable for you – many people sit to meditate, but there is no reason why you can't lie down if you prefer. Simply slow your breathing down and start to relax your muscles. If you find that your mind is starting to race again, try to concentrate on your breathing and how your body is feeling.

In time, you will find that you can empty your mind – but it may take many sessions before that happens naturally. Stick with it, because you will reap the rewards with increased meditation given long enough.

Break time into chunks

You may find it hard to concentrate simply because you do too much all in one go. If you have a huge project to complete at work, for example, you can only do so much at one time.

The best way to attack a project like this without burning yourself out is to break up the project into mini-projects. Then spend a certain amount of time on each mini-project before you take a break.

It is unlikely that you will be able to concentrate well for longer than half an hour at a time, so aim to take a break after half an hour, even if it is only to get up and stretch. After three or four blocks of half an hour, take a decent break of at least 20 minutes.

You can use the same strategy to break up your working day, whether you are in the office, outside, or at home. Have your list of things to do and work through them systematically, making sure you take regular breaks.

Don't wait until you are aware that your concentration isn't working; take a break long before then or you will find yourself too tired to do anything worthwhile.

Prioritize

Learning the art of prioritizing is important if you want to focus properly. When you get up, decide on the most important chores for the day and aim to get them over with first.

If you leave them until later in the day, the chances are that you will be too tired to concentrate on them properly and that you have spent much of the day worrying about getting them done while you complete other, less important, tasks.

The only reason not to get a major task over with first thing in the morning is if you know you don't work well until you've had chance to wake up properly. In that case, leave it until later in the morning and get more mundane tasks out of the way first.

Shut out Distractions

It goes without saying that you need to shut out distractions if you are to concentrate on your work properly. Train your brain to remember to deal with any distractions before you start your tasks. For example, you could shut down your email system and divert your phone, or tell colleagues that you need some quiet and not to disturb you for at least an hour.

Stop multi-tasking!

If you have a long list of chores to get done, you may find your brain working on over-drive. It can then be tempting to start doing several things at the same time, without really concentrating on any of them. Train your brain to deal with tasks one at a time.

This can be quite an art if you have always congratulated yourself on being able to multi-task – but it really is much better to focus on just one thing. Ultimately, you will get a lot more done that way.

If you can't concentrate properly, you won't be able to do anything to the best of your ability. However, by training your brain to look at things in a different way, you should soon be able to get a lot more done – and you'll find that it is of a much higher quality too.

Chapter 4

Strategies to improve your Critical Thinking and Reasoning Skills

If you've ever had to do a range of psychometric tests as part of a job application process, you will know how hard they can be. But companies choose to use psychometric tests to measure your behavioural style and mental capabilities.

Although many people believe they do not accurately measure their personality and ability to do a job, such tests have proved to be very reliable. As part of the testing process, you will probably have to do answer questions that test your critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Like it or not, you need good critical thinking and reasoning skills in just about everything you do, whether it is part of your job, or your everyday life. Basically, critical thinking involves evaluating the information you have at hand, and making the best possible decision based on that evaluation.

Reasoning is more about how you come to that decision – you can make a judgement based on logic, or you can let your emotions colour that judgement.

However, you don't need to apply for a job to improve your critical thinking and reasoning skills; there are plenty of simple strategies that you can introduce into your everyday life to train your brain to think and reason more effectively.

Question Everything

It is very easy to jump to conclusions before you know the full extent of the story. You will have grown up being taught that things are done in a certain way and you may be unwilling to consider that perhaps there are other ways to do things. In order to change your way of thinking, you need to start by questioning everything.

Don't automatically believe what you read in the press – go out and do your own research. By reading and listening to other ideas, you will help to keep your brain active and you will develop your critical thinking and reasoning skills further.

Consider other People's Views

Again, you may have got used to your own views and be unprepared to listen to anyone else's. However, the chances are that other people's views are just as valid as your own, provided that you give them the chance to air their views. One of the reasons for this is that you can get very emotive when you feel strongly about something.

You need to train your brain to get rid of the emotion you feel about certain subjects. Once you take emotion out of the equation, you may well find that you see things in a different way and, as a result, are able to make far more solid decisions.

Learn From Mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes. You will make plenty of them along the way just like everyone else. However, instead of trying to hide your mistakes and forget about them, you should train yourself to analyse where you went wrong.

This can be a very painful process, because no one likes to admit that they were wrong, but by doing so, you can use your critical thinking and reasoning skills to decide where you went wrong.

It may well have been because of emotion, which is a good lesson to learn – then you know that the next time you make an important decision, you will need to find strategies to avoid that emotion.

Make a note of all your mistakes in a diary and what you could have done to make a better decision. You will then have written detail of your thoughts to refer back to as necessary.

Practice Making Decisions

You make decisions on a daily basis, from deciding what to wear in the morning to deciding what time you want to go to bed. However, you can practice the strategies above by taking one relatively minor problem you have every day and deciding what you can do about it. For the sake of providing an example, say that you need to decide whether to let your 13-year-old daughter go to a party on Friday night.

Firstly, you need to ask plenty of questions. Find out as much as you can about the party – whether there will be any adults present, who amongst your daughter’s friends will be attending and whether any alcohol will be allowed. Listen to what other people have to say too.

Then, based on what you know, you need to draw up a list of pros and cons of letting your daughter go. Put them down on paper, then walk away and do something else for a while.

When you come back to your list of pros and cons, you’ll probably immediately see that some of them are based on your emotions. Get rid of these. You need to make a decision that is based on non-emotive reasoning.

There is no right or wrong answer to making decisions like these; the key thing is that you are using your critical thinking and reasoning skills to come up with an answer that is based on the facts that you know and not your emotions.

Complete Psychometric Tests

Psychometric tests do have their uses, even if they are not the most enjoyable way to spend your free time. You will find plenty of examples online. They usually include the following.

Verbal reasoning tests

These give you a paragraph of information and then ask you to answer questions based on your comprehension of the text. Their aim is to encourage you to think critically, rather than assess your vocabulary.

Situational judgement tests

These tests give you a situation, usually work-related, and then ask you to use your common sense to choose the answer that is most relevant.

Diagrammatic reasoning tests

These ask you to infer a set of rules from a series of diagrams and then apply those rules to a new situation.

Numerical reasoning tests

These test your ability to deal with numbers and how quickly you can do so. You will probably be required to have a certain level of mathematical ability.

Being able to think on your feet and come up with the best possible decision is something that you need to do on a daily basis. Training your brain to think critically based on the facts you have is a great way of exercising your brain.

Chapter 5

Strategies to increase the Speed at which you're Brain Works

Improving your memory, concentration and critical thinking and reasoning skills should all help you to increase the speed at which your brain works. However, there are yet more strategies by which you can improve your mental capacity and therefore get things done more quickly and efficiently.

Repetition

If you want to get faster at what you do, the best way is to repeat tasks until you find ways of doing things most efficiently. Once you have done this, remember the most efficient methods you have discovered and make sure that these are the methods you use from now on.

You may need to keep repeating the methods so that your brain gets used to how you want to do things. In so doing, the brain creates connections that it will remember when repeating the same tasks.

To make more sense of this, think back to when you were a child and were learning new vocabulary. You would ask your parents to read the same story to you over and over again. In so doing, you would learn from the experience. But if you didn't keep hearing the story, you would have forgotten the new vocabulary because your brain had forgotten the connections it had made.

Speed Reading

Speed reading is a skill that many people don't develop properly, primarily because they don't read often enough. Then, when they do read, they are forced to read every word slowly in order to let the information sink in.

In actual fact, you don't need to read every single word in order to understand the meaning of what you are reading; just knowing what the key words are will allow you to know what is going on.

In order to speed read, you need to set aside a certain amount of time every day to read – usually first thing in the morning before you become tired is best. Choose whatever you feel most comfortable with; if you don't like fiction, or long-winded text books, choose something like a newspaper, or a magazine article.

Don't read the words out loud in your head as you are reading; you will be forced to read every single word if you do. You will find speed reading becomes easier as you practice; you just need to train your brain to do so.

You can buy speed reading software. Usually, this will involve flashing a sentence or piece of text up on the screen and then asking you questions based on what you have read. However, you don't need to purchase such software unless you really want to.

Speed reading can be particularly useful if you have to read lots of text at work or for your studies. It will enable you to skim books and articles until you find the information that you want. You can then take your time to read only what is relevant.

Speed Thinking

Speed thinking is a concept created by Dr Ken Hudson, although other experts have spoken and written about similar ideas in the past. The aim is that you only have a certain amount of time in which to make a decision and, as a result, you have to strip out all of your egotistical thoughts and only have time to make a decision based on the information that you have. The idea is that it complements, rather than replaces traditional thinking.

Dr Hudson's speed thinking system is based on a four-step process, which asks the thinker to start, evaluate, build and act. He has written books on speed thinking, such as "How to thrive in a time-poor world," and has a website which presents many of his ideas.

You can, however, train yourself to speed think without the aid of expensive books. You just need to train yourself to make decisions quickly by not giving yourself enough time to analyse issues in too much depth. For example, if you need to eat, don't sit and think about what you would like to eat; just go to the kitchen, open the fridge and eat whatever is most convenient.

There are times when speed thinking is not appropriate. If you are doing something that could involve danger, for example, you really need to think through your options before making the one that is safest.

However, for some things, such as deciding what you are going to do next, speed thinking can be a useful concept and can help you to avoid

procrastination.

Embrace the New

Repetition, speed reading and speed thinking all have their place; however, if you want to continue to challenge your brain and keep it active, thereby enabling it to react quickly, you really need to try new things on a regular basis. Challenge yourself by doing something that you wouldn't usually do. It will force you to think in different ways and could just change your life.

To train your brain to work more quickly, you need to keep it active and learn how to save time while working accurately. Repetition, speed reading, speed thinking and embracing new things are all ways that you can train your brain to react more quickly.

Conclusion

You may have decided to read this book because you have problems with remembering things, concentrating at work, doing things too slowly, or simply because you want to stave off the possibility of dementia for as long as possible.

By now, you should have learned plenty of tips to train your brain. However, bear in mind that you need to practice these tips on a regular basis.

Whether you decide to invest in expensive tools that profess to train your brain is entirely up to you. However, there are plenty of methods, mentioned in the chapters of this book, that you can increase your mental capacity without such tools.

The next step you should take is to put some of these methods into practice. Focus on the chapter which you feel is most relevant to you and take it from there. However, don't neglect the ideas in the other chapters, because you may well find them helpful too.

It cannot be stressed enough that you should not forget to pay attention to your health. Your brain will never work at full capacity if your physical and mental health is poor. If you don't already do so, make an effort to start eating healthily, cut down on your alcohol intake and get some regular

exercise. Only then will you be ready to start training your brain to work more quickly and accurately.

Finally, if you've enjoyed this book, I'd like to ask you a favour; would you be kind enough to leave a review of this book on Amazon? It would be greatly appreciated.