

THE BIG IDEAS

The Problem
And the promise.

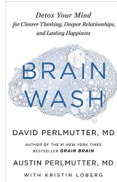
Disconnection Syndrome
Is at the root of our ills.

The Ten-Day Brain Wash
Follow these core steps.

T.I.M.E.
Does it pass the test?

Clear the Table
And wash your brain.

It's the Little Things
We need YOU!



Brain Wash

Detox Your Mind for Clearer Thinking, Deeper Relationships, and Lasting Happiness

BY DAVID PERLMUTTER, MD AND AUSTIN PERLMUTTER, MD · LITTLE, BROWN SPARK
© 2020 · 294 PAGES

“Here’s the paradox that persecutes us today: modernity provides us with infinite opportunities. We can eat whatever we want whenever we want. We can completely immerse ourselves in the vast, enticing world of digital media. We can buy goods and services and even find potential mates with the touch of a button or swipe of a finger. We can live around the clock in a virtual world where everything about us is public, from our thoughts and perspectives to our purchases, photos, browsing habits, likes and dislikes, and location. We think this 24-7 ‘new reality’ should make us healthy and happy. But it doesn’t. The systems in place to meet—and exceed in many regards—all our basic needs do not create Utopia. Quite the opposite. We struggle with soaring rates of largely preventable illnesses, and many of us are more lonely, depressed, and anxious than ever before. Genuine joy remains elusive. ...

Despite the scope of this book, our strategy focused on creating a practical framework that you can implement in your life right away. We live and work in the modern world and understand the limitations of what’s possible and realistic. The good news is that so much of what’s keeping us from achieving lasting health and happiness is within our power to change. We know you can get there—through an overhaul of your mind’s operating system. We don’t have to be victims of poor health, loneliness, and the constant urge to pursue the next short-term fix. This new framework—a reconnecting, life-changing ‘brain wash’—teaches you how to clean up your mind and activate the brain pathways that bring clear thinking, deep relationships, and mental well-being.”

~ David Perlmutter, MD and Austin Perlmutter, MD from *Brain Wash*

*“If you want to be happy,
be.”*

~ Leo Tolstoy

This is our fifth (!) Note on one of David Perlmutter’s great books.

We’ve covered [Grain Brain](#), [Brain Maker](#), [The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan](#) and [Power Up Your Brain](#). As I said in the other intros, David Perlmutter is both a board-certified neurologist and Fellow of the American College of Nutrition. He and his work have deeply influenced our lives.

One of the things that makes [this book](#) so great is the fact that David wrote it with his son, Austin—who also happens to be an MD—in his case, a board-certified internal medicine physician. (He also happens to be a VERY cool human. He and I had a chance to connect recently while he was vacationing in Bali. We both left the chat buzzing with inspiration.)

As David and Austin say, the book builds on a simple premise:

“Our brain’s performance is being gravely manipulated, resulting in behaviors that leave us more lonely, anxious, depressed, distrustful, illness-prone, and overweight than ever before. At the same time, we feel disconnected from ourselves, from others and from the world at large.”

Their solution? We need to overhaul our mind’s operating system. How? Via a “brain wash.”

The book is packed with Big Ideas on how to Optimize not only our nutrition but how we interact with our technology, ourselves and one another. I'm excited to share some of my favorite Ideas we can apply to our lives TODAY, so let's jump straight in!

"In the materialistic way of life, there's no concept of friendship, no concept of love, just work, twenty-four hours a day, like a machine. So in modern society, we eventually become part of that larger moving machine."

~ His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

THE PROBLEM (AND THE PROMISE)

"Our dietary choices are among many lifestyle habits that can lead to either wellness or chronic disease. Chronic disease accounts for 70 percent of American deaths: half of Americans are suffering from at least one chronic illness, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. And while we continue to argue over how to change our health-care system, we forget that we spend 75 percent of our health-care dollars on preventable diseases. The World Health Organization now ranks chronic degenerative diseases such as the illnesses we just mentioned as collectively the number one cause of death on the planet, ahead of famine, infectious diseases, and wars.

That may not be news to you if you are aware of the critical link between poor diet and disease. But what you may not realize is that **the food you eat and the beverages you drink change your emotions, your thoughts, and the way you perceive the world.** Just as important, your mood and perceptions also directly and powerfully influence your dietary choices. This fact is exploited by the food-production industry and creates a vicious cycle that will destroy your health—and your mind. We will show you how to break it. But this is so much bigger than just our food choices."

That's from the Introduction in which David and Austin present "The Problem" and "The Promise."

I've read variations of those stats *many* times. But each time I actually slow down and think about them, I'm blown away.

Think about it for a moment. HALF of Americans are suffering from at least (!) one chronic disease like diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's disease. (HALF!)

And...

As we argue about how to change/finance our health-care system, we forget the fact that 75% of the money we spend on health-care is for the treatment of chronic diseases that were PREVENTABLE in the first place. (SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT!!)

Krishnamurti comes to mind, yet again: *"It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society."*

Of course, the "Promise" of the book is all about helping us SOLVE that Problem—on a personal, local and global level. Let's take a quick look at the name they give the underlying problem then look at how to go about washing those beautiful brains of ours.

DISCONNECTION SYNDROME

"Your attention and your decisions are sold to the highest bidder, to companies with the best understanding of how to manipulate your psychology and biology for their own profit. These companies understand how to tap into powerful neurological pathways, creating a nearly irresistible addiction to short-term pleasures and a commercialized illusion of sustainable joy. We call this state of separation from sustainable happiness disconnection syndrome, and it's time to take a stand against it."

That's from Chapter #1: "Disconnection Syndrome."

David and Austin tell us that we're DISCONNECTED from the best version of ourselves, our families, our communities and our world.

"Do not bite at the bait of pleasure till you know there is no hook beneath it."

~ Thomas Jefferson

"True health is a vibrant state of mental and physical well-being that transcends any specific diagnosis. This place of wellness is found through deep connection to ourselves, to others, and to the living space that we share with all humans."

~ David and Austin Perlmutter

They've identified eight characteristics of disconnection syndrome: mindless activity, loneliness, chronic inflammation, instant gratification, narcissism, poor relationships, chronic stress, and impulsivity. (Just typing out that list increased my stress! :)

Part I of the book features a high-level overview of why we've become more disconnected than ever. Part II is all about what we can do about it.

Let's jump to the end of the book and look at their top practical tips, then we'll step back and drill into a few Ideas in depth.

THE TEN-DAY BRAIN WASH

"Welcome to the Ten-Day Brain Wash. This is a reset for your brain and body. Its purpose is to help you to reclaim your health and joy by giving you back control over your thinking, decision making, and behavior. You will transform your habits, your relationships, and the way you experience your life. It starts with just ten days of focused effort. You can do this.

Let's begin with a few core principles. First, you have to want to change for this to work. If you're content with an impulsive, disconnected lifestyle, and you don't mind all the damaging effects it imposes on your physical and mental health, this program isn't for you. Second, you shouldn't expect that this will immediately solve all your problems. **This is not a quick fix.** We're giving you a blueprint for long-term success and the permanent recalibration of your mental machinery."

That's from one of the last chapters of the book in which David and Austin wrap up their practical tools into a concise, "Ten-Day Brain Wash" protocol to help us move from theory to practice on the core fundamentals of their approach.

But, first...

We need to want to change.

Might sound obvious but it's easy to skip this essential first step. If we're comfy with our impulsive, disconnected lifestyle and we don't mind all the damaging effects its putting on our mind and bodies then... well... carry on.

Assuming we have the proper motivation, we've gotta be in it for the long haul. No quick fixes.

Which leads us to the "core Brain Wash components:

- *Apply the test of T.I.M.E. to all digital activities.*
- *Establish a daily practice of empathy.*
- *Spend thirty minutes a week in nature.*
- *Abide by the Brain Wash diet.*
- *Exercise for thirty minutes five days a week.*
- *Prioritize getting at least seven hours of sleep a night.*
- *Meditate for at least twelve minutes a day.*
- *Dedicate at least ten minutes a day to improving interpersonal relationships."*

I love the parallels between their protocol and our (always-evolving) Optimize protocol.

Optimize time with technology? Check. We'll talk about their T.I.M.E. tool next.

Eat well? Check. The Brain Wash standard includes reducing/eliminating sugar and ultra-processed foods which have been engineered to hack your reward circuitry and keep you coming back for more and more while destroying your health and self-control.

"If you are in a bad mood, go for a walk. If you are still in a bad mood, go for another walk."

~ Hippocrates

"The food you eat can be either the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison."

~ Ann Wigmore

Move? Check. 30 minutes a day, five times a week. Bonus doing it in nature. Double bonus doing it in nature with no technology. Triple that bonus by inviting a friend.

Sleep? Check. The #1 book they recommend? [Why We Sleep](#) by Matthew Walker. You getting the sleep you need? AT LEAST seven hours a night of actual sleep?

Meditate? Check. They discuss some research demonstrating the powerful effects of meditating for as little as twelve minutes a day.

Then they throw in some great empathy practices to combat the rampant selfishness and narcissism our modern lifestyles can create. Key practice? GRATITUDE!!

Plus, they encourage us to dedicate at least ten minutes a day of FOCUSED time (without tech!) to improving our relationships.

How're YOU doing with that?

What's the #1 thing that would give you the greatest gains?

TODAY a good day to rock it?

DOES IT PASS THE TEST OF T.I.M.E.?

"Apps have started to emerge to help people track their screen time and avoid smartphone addiction. But you don't need an app for this exercise. You can go low-tech here and use our T.I.M.E. tool. When approaching your use of technology, especially when it comes to digital media and communication, you need to make sure your activities are making good use of T.I.M.E. This means they need to be...

Time restricted. Create and abide by a minimal window of time for accomplishing your goals. If you want to watch YouTube videos or scroll through a social media platform—but you often spend more time than you'd like doing so—set a timer to go off after twenty minutes. ...

Intentional. As we've described in detail, so much of our interaction with technology is designed to benefit others. Becoming more intentional about our use of digital products helps put the power back in your hands. ...

Mindful. A mindful approach to digital media consumption means bringing awareness to the way you're using these technologies while you're using them as well as awareness of the way they are affecting you. ...

Enriching. The digital sphere is filled with clickbait and other content designed to capture your attention. Much of it is a waste of time."

That's from Chapter 4: "[High-Tech Hijack: How Digital Life Disconnects.](#)"

It's one of my favorite tips/tools from the book.

It's simple. Want to master your use of technology?

Make sure it passes "the test of T.I.M.E."

Start by making sure your use of technology is "Time restricted." Then make sure you're being "Intentional" and "Mindful" about it. Then, of course, make sure the experience itself is "Enriching."

I'm reminded of some wisdom from [Indistractable](#). Nir Eyal tells us that anything we do is either giving us "traction" toward our goals or is a "distraction" standing in the way of achieving our goals and expressing the best version of ourselves.

He tells us that we need to ask "the critical question" before engaging in technology: "*Is this trigger serving me, or am I serving it?*"

"We highly recommend employing the T.I.M.E. framework for social media use, TV viewing, internet browsing, online shopping, smartphone scrolling, emailing, and even responding to text messages. Manage your digital exposure by remembering the four characteristics of healthful digital activity: Time restricted, Intentional, Mindful, Enriching."

~ David and Austin Perlmutter

"The way you think and feel—and in turn experience and respond to the world around you—is highly influenced by the health of your gut. And that is a direct reflection of your food choices."

~ David and Austin Perlmutter

Then there's Cal Newport's parallel wisdom from [Digital Minimalism](#) where he tells us: "The sugar high of convenience is fleeting and the sting of missing out dulls rapidly, but the meaningful glow that comes from taking charge of what claims your time and attention is something that persists."

It's T.I.M.E. to connect to the best version of ourselves. TODAY.

P.S. Did you know that "79 percent of adults reach for their smartphones in the first fifteen minutes after waking up?" And... "That number climbs to 89 percent among people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Right away, we satisfy the craving to check our phones—a result of the dopamine surge."

P.P.S. I thought this quote they shared by Matt Cutts (software engineer and former head of Google's Web spam team) was pretty funny: "When you've got five minutes to fill, Twitter is a great way to fill thirty-five minutes."

P.P.P.S. Remember this gem from Christian Lous Lange, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize: "Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master."

CLEAR THE TABLE

"One of the ways scientists study abdominal obesity is by measuring the waist-to-hip ratio (WHR). A high WHR generally indicates the presence of a high level of abdominal fat. In 2012, researchers indicated that women with a high WHR exhibited less empathy than those with a low WHR, but by contrast, 'women with low WHRs [excelled] at identifying emotional states of other people.' Make no mistake: fat around your middle could be shaping your thoughts and decision making for the worse. Our goal is to break this vicious cycle."

That's from the chapter on the Brain Wash diet called "Clear the Table: Food for Thought."

I pulled out that particular passage because a) I find it fascinating AND b) we're integrating a similar waist-to-height ratio (WHtR) as one of the standards for our Optimize Coach program.

As we discussed in our Notes on Robert Lustig's [Fat Chance](#), we know that waist circumference is, arguably, the single-best predictor of morbidity.

(I repeat: Visceral fat (fat around your belly!!) is dangerous, folks!!)

But...

Who knew that it's ALSO a predictor of EMPATHY? (Wow.)

That's not all.

Get this: "Most concerning, they found that the wider the waist circumference, the stronger the activation in the addiction circuits of the brain. **Our fat cells are accomplices in keeping us hooked, ultimately blocking us from connecting to our prefrontal cortices and thus preventing us from making good dietary decisions.**"

Practically speaking, we need to know that "We are disconnected from the foods that nourish our brains and bodies."

The primary culprit? Well, we've gotta know that "modern, ultraprocessed food is a form of biological warfare, taking over your brain's decision making and emotional regulation."

The solution? In short: We need to minimize inflammation by eating "foods low in refined sugars and carbohydrates; non-GMO as much as possible; organic whenever feasible; fiber-rich, colorful produce (making up most of the plate)..."

What's ONE thing you know you could do diet-wise to wash your brain?

"To summarize, sugar (and the simple carbohydrates that your body rapidly converts into sugar) powerfully hacks into your reward pathway, altering your neurochemistry to keep you unhealthy and coming back for more. And in fact that's exactly what the ultraprocessed-food producers want."

~ David and Austin Perlmutter

“Either you control your brain or others will do it for you.”

~ David and Austin Perlmutter

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

“Yes, we will each face momentous trials and tribulations during which we must fight against the despair and anger within our heads. But most of the battles for our minds are being played out in the spaces between these major life events. It’s the little things—the food we choose to eat, the technology we use, the news we subscribe to, the media we consume, the relationships we choose to foster—that will determine whether our brains belong to us or those who seek to hijack them. This is a wake-up call. It is a chance to see the world for what it is and ask whether your story is your own. If you find it is not, this is your chance to take it back.

You have to make a decision. Will you let others determine your fate, allowing them to rewire your brain? Or will you instead harness the power of neuroplasticity for your own gain and rebuild your brain for the life you want? We believe that disconnection syndrome can be healed on an individual and societal level. But we can’t do this alone. We need one another. *We need you.*”

Those are the very last words of the book.

Two things to remember:

1. It’s the little things.

And...

2. We need you.

Now more than ever. Let’s be the authors of our own lives as we give our brains a nice little wash and go give the world all we’ve got!

B

Brian Johnson,
Philosopher in Residence

If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...

[Grain Brain](#)

[Brain Maker](#)

[The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan](#)

[Digital Minimalism](#)

[Indistractable](#)

[Irresistible](#)

[Why We Sleep](#)

[Why We Get Fat](#)

[Sapiens](#)

[Bright Line Eating](#)

About the Author of “Brain Wash”

AUTHOR 1 + 2



David Perlmutter, MD, FACN, ABIHM is a Board-Certified Neurologist and Fellow of the American College of Nutrition. He received his M.D. degree from the University of Miami School of Medicine where he was awarded the Leonard G. Rowntree Research Award for best research by a medical student. After completing residency training in Neurology, also at the University of Miami, Dr. Perlmutter entered private practice in Naples, Florida.



Austin Perlmutter, MD, is a board-certified internal medicine physician. He received his medical degree from the University of Miami and completed his internal medicine residency at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland Oregon. His academic interests center on studying the effects of burnout and depression as well as preventive care and chronic disease management.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.