

STRESS MASTERY: THE GATEWAY TO IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH

Insights and Lessons from Total
Brain's Podcast Series



Stress Mastery: the gateway to improved Mental Health.

This short eBook is a summary of key extracts from 3 Total Brain Podcasts around stress. The host, Dr. Evian Gordon provides the context extracts and quotes from Dr. David Whitehouse have been selected from each podcast.

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Introduction

We've all been experiencing elevated levels of stress since COVID-19 hit the United States, followed by an economic crisis and the loss of tens of millions of jobs. Experiencing elevated stress for a short period of time can be manageable or even helpful if one is fleeing from danger, for instance, or even pushing hard to meet a deadline at work. However, the prolonged nature of the pandemic and all that has followed has created a perpetual state of stress, which directly impacts our mental health.

The Role of Stress in Mental Health

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How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

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What Is Your How?

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Dr. Evian Gordon, MD PhD, Founder, Chairman and Chief Medical Officer for Total Brain, hosted the podcast series.



His guest was Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD, a Harvard trained Psychiatrist with more than 20 years of experience with leading managed behavior care companies in the United States.

The Role of Stress in Mental Health



The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Start with the End in Mind: Chronic Stress Is the Doorway to All Mental Health Conditions

There are three key takeaways to know about the role of stress in mental health and the actions that help manage stress:

- 1 Reframing** how you react to stress is incredibly important, your response to stress can be modified.
- 2** The most damaging stress to your mental health is the **chronic and unconscious stress** that we habitually ignore, or never acknowledge.
- 3** Discover and **magnify what works for you** to manage your stress.

More lessons from **The Role of Stress in Mental Health podcast** are shared on the following pages.

The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Lesson: As stress attacks us, there appears to be no learned capability to put this threat to sleep.

“We reach for an elixir that for some moment can turn the firing of stress neurons off. Something that can calm that beast. That dynamic lays down new neuronal patterns, new threats, because it begins to train the brain in maladaptive ways of dealing with stress.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

Behind each mental health condition (anxiety, depression, addiction, ADHD, PTSD), there is the sense of an emotional, ecological system that surrounds you in chaos. It produces levels of threat that can overwhelm and break any system under the right circumstance.



The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Lesson: Medication versus alternatives is a false dichotomy.

Medication can be life changing in some cases. Medication can make it possible for the body system to win a fight and can provide some instantaneous relief. For a time-limited episode, you can take medication for a while and see that episode resolved. And you can reboot — hopefully in a correct fashion.

But it is the non-pharmacologic options, such as the brain training techniques and the cognitive therapy techniques, that are creating and permanently restoring the pathways that allow the brain to heal itself.



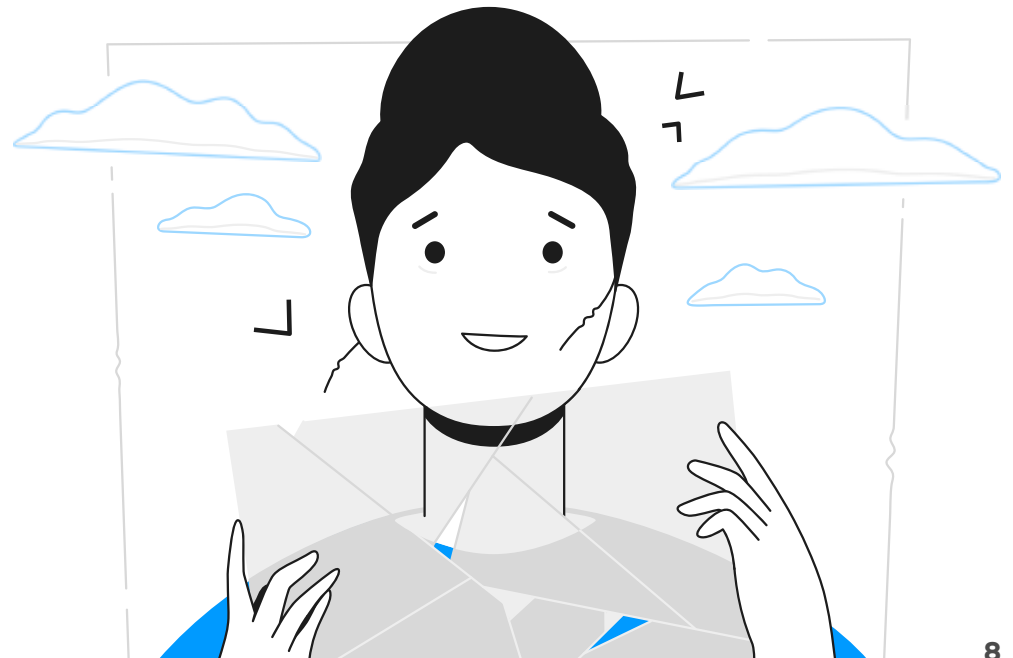
The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Lesson: Individuals must be willing to make changes to reduce stress.

Giving anyone a list of things to do, such as reduce stress, eat healthy, sleep naturally, exercise more etc., is singularly unsuccessful in bridging the crucial gap between knowing and doing.

“Until people own it in terms of really being ready to change, and until they get a handle on how to control their stress in the moment, and until they see a benefit that it can work, it’s very hard for them to actually do it and sustain it into a new habit.”

Dr. Evian Gordon, MD PhD



The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Lesson: The brain is a threat detection system that is sometimes guided by flawed principles.

The brain is continuously scanning for patterns and assessing threats by going to the brain's memory library to look for patterns and to look for the familiar. That library is idiosyncratically constructed by each person and frequently contains ways of categorizing experiences that are flawed. Those, then, become operating principles.

“ You may have put in your library a whole list of books that say, ‘people like me at first, but if they know me long enough, I come to disappoint them.’ And any experience that ever met any of the criteria surrounding that statement got catalogued in there to color every single new meeting and new experience. That is how threat is perceived. We can take some of those books back out and look at them and say, ‘How true and valid is this? You say it’s valid all the time? No, it is not!’ And that change in thinking, reframing, and relooking at the language can transform the way you view and experience the world.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

The Role of Stress in Mental Health

Lesson: Online therapy can be incredibly effective.

There are international studies from many different countries that show online Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) can be the equivalent of meeting with a cognitive therapist face to face.

“What is new to so many of us, because we’ve never thought this way as therapists, is that there may be some acutely personal connection and the therapeutic alliance may be critical for one person at one point in time. We have to think differently about how we use everything that is available to us. And online therapy can be incredibly effective.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD



How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health



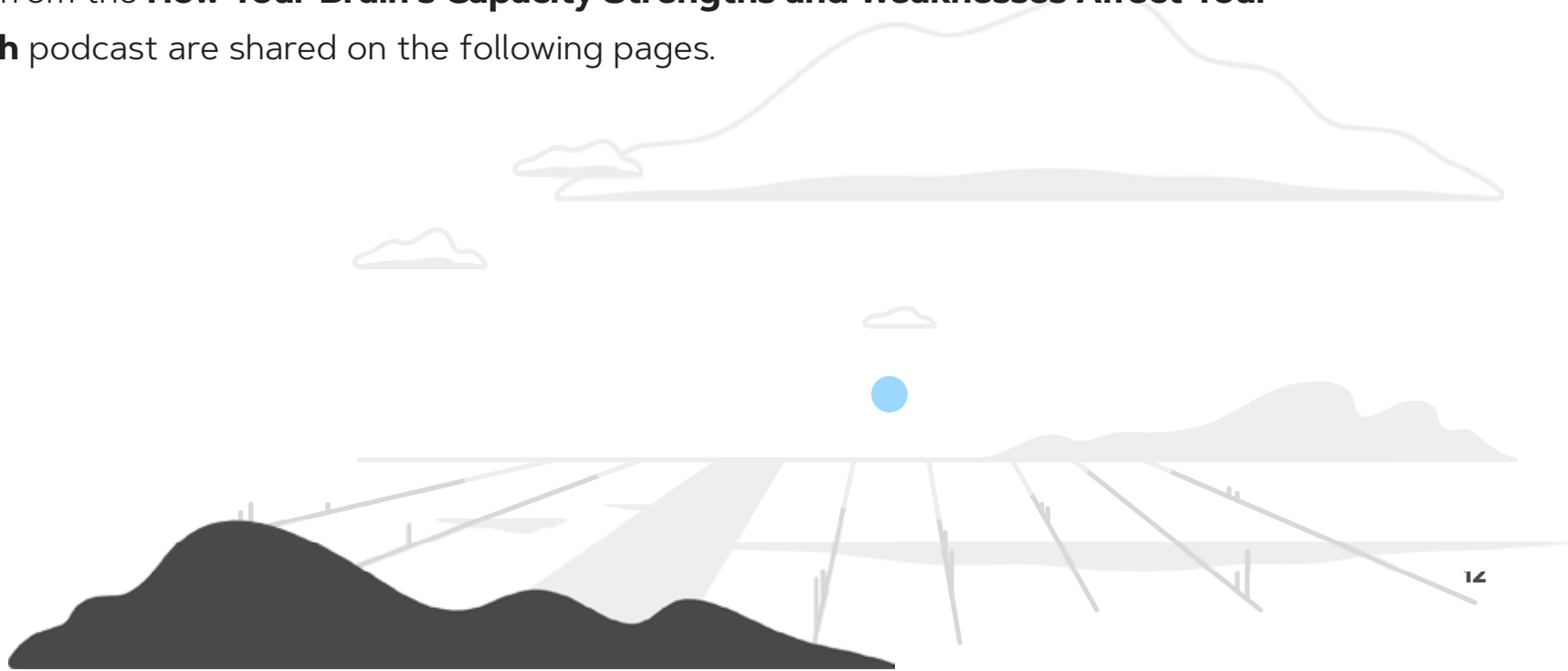
How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Start with the End in Mind: Mental Health Is the Expression of Our Total Brain Capacities

The critical concept to know about your capacity strengths and weaknesses is:

It is important to have at least some understanding of the capacities of your own brain, regardless of whether you're suffering from mental or emotional illness or not. This is an essential part of understanding yourself.

More lessons from the **How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health** podcast are shared on the following pages.



How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Talking about key brain capacities is valuable.

“Understanding the functioning of the brain's key capacity signs and how they relate to emotional health is valuable for transforming individuals' lives.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

Talking about key capacities can begin to demystify the brain to people so that they can take back ownership of their own brains in a much more understandable way.

“The first and most important adjunct that the approach to looking at the brain cognitively brings, is that the training of psychiatry is around clusters of 'symptoms' that patients express. While incredibly helpful and allowing patients to be placed in groups to point towards treatments which are most effective for patients who belong to those clusters, we know symptoms alone have still left us struggling.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: Understanding capacities allows you to take back your brain.

Exploring brain capacities, how they may have been hijacked, and how they can be restored helps you own your brain and shape your health and wellness as much as possible. Some people can understand capacities on their own, other people need a guide to help bring them back. Either way, understanding capacities changes things.

“In one sense, the psychiatry of symptom complexes leaves the whole theory of causality out. So, it's like: You have this illness, and this is the right treatment. Why is this the right treatment? How is it working? That is often left unsaid. So, individuals still feel at a loss, disempowered. But when somebody explains the capacities and how they may have been hijacked but can be restored, you begin to take back your own brain. You begin to own your brain.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

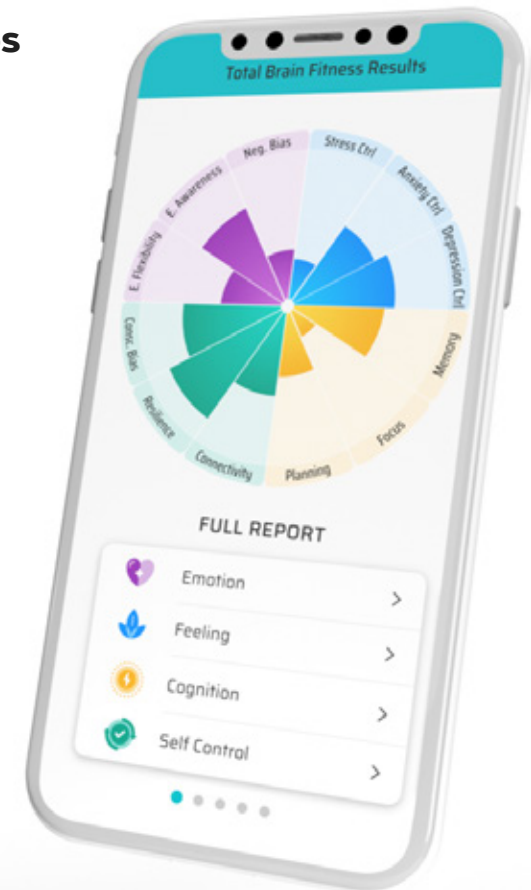
How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: Investigating capacities and using tools like Total Brain helps reduce stress.

Now we can really look at how individuals interact between their brain capacities and the world they live in. We can look at:

- The way this guides them in their interpersonal relationships
- How it helps or hinders them when they feel threatened or stressed
- The way it disrupts their capacity at work to focus and get things done so that their lives become miserable or difficult

Understanding these things in terms of capacities and giving individuals tools like those in Total Brain is a powerful way help to reduce stress and enhance capacity deficits.



How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: The Total Brain framework is comprised of 12 brain capacities.

"Safety first" is the key organizing principle of the brain. The brain's two modes of thinking are non-conscious and conscious. These principles are underpinned by four functions: Emotion, Feeling, Cognition and Self-Control. Each of these are comprised of 3 capacities: a total of 12 brain capacities.

Emotions drive Feelings and Cognition. Self-Control brings it all together.

"The people that use Total Brain effectively, often start off by looking at the safety-first organizing principle. They look at how well their Stress Control capacity scores align. Poor Stress Control is often associated with other low capacity scores. A common second step, is to look at how well the Emotion and the Cognition capacity scores align. A third step is to examine Self-Regulation"

Dr. Evian Gordon, MD PhD

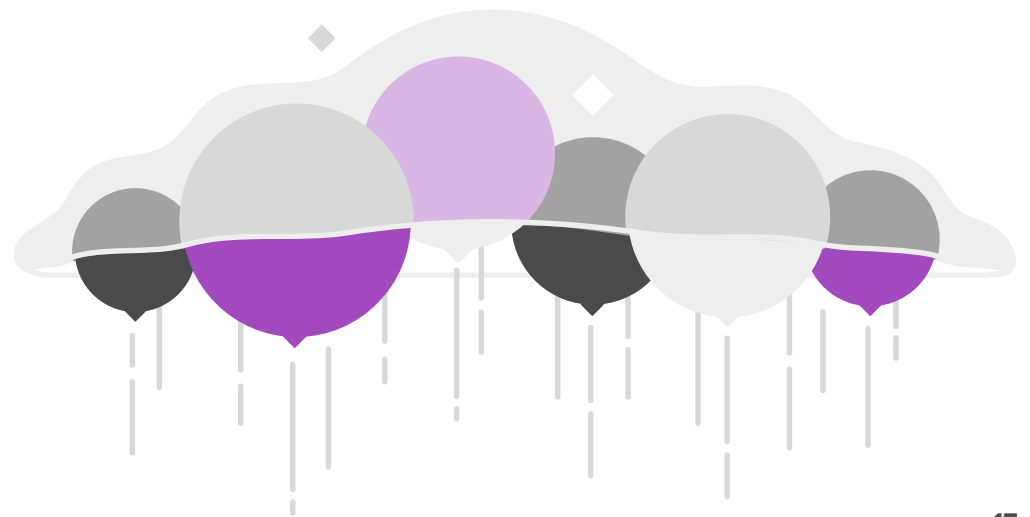
How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: Anxiety: Individuals are often not aware of their unconscious bias.

Total Brain helps identify unconscious bias and train the brain for improvement.

“There’s power in looking at a capacity like facial recognition of emotions and realizing that depending upon an individual’s emotional state, they may see bias in faces towards anger, depression, or sadness. A person who suffers from depression will see sadness in many more faces than a regular person. The individual themselves is not aware of that unconscious bias, and to be able to put a marker on that, change it, and track it with Total Brain is amazing.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD



How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

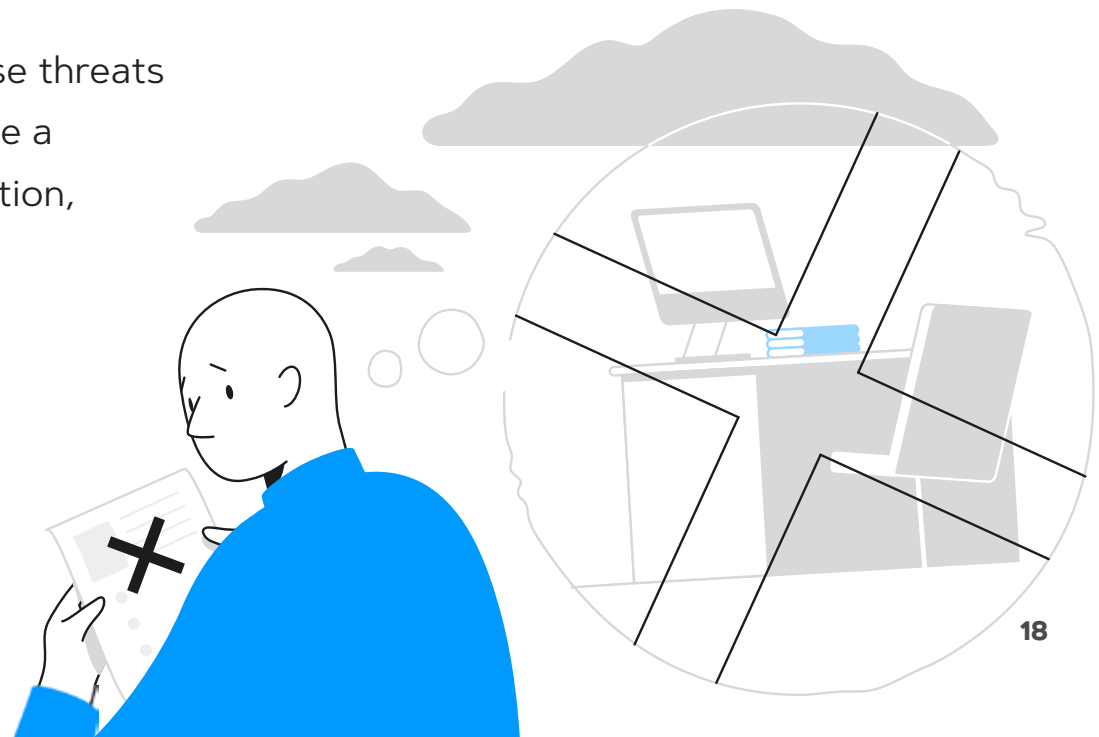
Lesson: Depression: The brain has a tendency to generalize.

To make life simple, the brain generalizes at times. Unfortunately, this can create stress.

“In cognitive therapy, we have a series of cognitions that we can take. We may begin with: People tend to like me at first, but after they get to know me, I disappoint them. While that experience may have happened only on one or two occasions, it sadly gets put into the brain as an operating rule. The rule is generalized into: This will apply on ALL occasions.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

The brain also analyzes the extent that we cause threats ourselves. It then looks at what we did to create a negative situation. That becomes a personalization, subject at times to distortion, which results in feelings of guilt and shame. This can be very negative and cause stress that — though it originated internally — we have to work to escape.



How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: Addiction: Sufferers from addiction are not aware of the extent to which the brain and the reward system are hijacked.

Individuals that suffer from addiction don't recognize that their cognitive circuits — the functioning of things like working memory, decision making, and planning functions — are transformed and hijacked. Unfortunately, we know that in the face of addiction cravings, unless cognitive capacities are restored, the opportunity for relapse is exceptionally high.

Cravings are powerful. They can distort memories of what an addictive substance did. Although a person with addiction may steer clear of a substance itself, their distorted memories remind them of the alleged positive of the substance and the relief it offers.

“We need cognitions to show whether we're winning that addiction battle, and to tell us when people are vulnerable. So, we need to assess those capacities often. Capacities are much better tests of how a hijacked brain is functioning than asking someone: Are you doing okay?”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: PTSD: There are opportunities to train the brain to distract memory circuits.

Some memory circuits are so deep and resilient it seems that they run like repeated television shows again and again and can't be stopped. When thinking about PTSD and brain capacities, the opportunity is to look at how other areas of brain functioning can be trained to act as distractors.

"The idea is to look at how autonomic arousal can be lessened through things like targeted breathing to increase heart rate variability and calm.**"**

Dr. Evian Gordon, MD PhD

How Your Brain's Capacity Strengths and Weaknesses Affect Your Mental Health

Lesson: ADHD: Attention can be measured in certain instances using online or cell phone data.

Is the problem concentration? Is it memory? Individuals have little ability to differentiate those things in the lived experience. It is only when you look at each capacity, measure each as different capacities, and relate them to things like anxiety, that you can begin to calculate severity, degree, and situation or circumstance in a useful way.

“One of the interesting things to me is that, as a physician, in almost every aspect, you try to get some capacity to measure the extent that something is changing. With something like attention, we can measure it under certain situations, and use online or cell phone data to do it.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

What Is Your HOW?



What Is Your HOW?

Start with the End in Mind: Have a Strategy to Change Your Thoughts

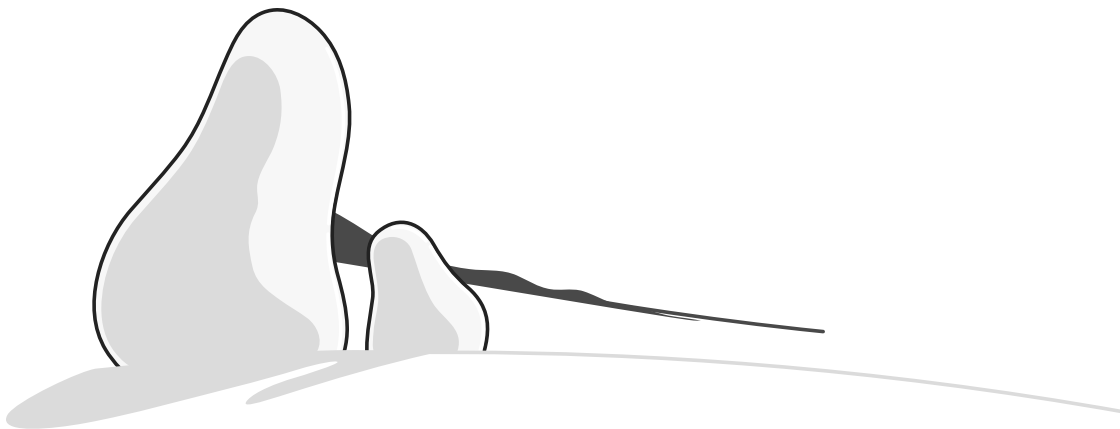
In five simple steps, we can learn to build a sustainable stress reduction habit. The five-step strategy involves:

- **Clarifying the “Why?”**
- **Being ready for change**
- **Knowing your brain capacities**
- **Training for the moment**
- **Tracking your progress**

“Have a strategy to change your thoughts in the moment, in seconds. That is the key to switch many of the approximately 50,000 thoughts we have a day, from negative to positive, from stress to calm.”

Dr. Evian Gordon, MD PhD

More lessons from the What Is Your HOW? podcast are shared on the following pages.



What Is Your HOW?

Lesson: There's a proven strategy for building a successful stress reduction habit

Here is how to rewire a sustainable stress reduction habit with five key steps:

WHY? Clarify why you are doing this. The clearer your “WHY” the stronger your commitment will be.

READY Decide if you are ready to change. Are you ready to own it?

CAPACITIES Know your brain capacities. If you know your strengths and weaknesses, you can choose what areas to train.

TRAIN FOR THE MOMENT Start training stress reduction with the end in mind: that is to switch negative anguish into positive calm in the moment. One example is using MyCalmBeat to control your breathing. Train regularly with small steps, and use immersive training. Combine tactics for circuit breaking stress in the moment with more structural brain trainings for stress reduction such as: reframing with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness, meditation, and boosting positivity.

TRACK Measure it so you can manage it. Track your milestones and start with a 30-day training challenge. Once you train for about 2 hours (that's a minimum of 10 minutes a day, three times a week, for four weeks) you will have wired a switch in your brain that you can use at any time to flip on your new habits.

What Is Your HOW?

Lesson: Training with Total Brain's MyCalmBeat helps reduce blood pressure and stress.

Breathing six breaths a minute (and using a digital breathing pacer so you can do it accurately) will strengthen the system that controls your blood pressure. This is deep biology driven by a thinking process. It is like putting a positive switch on two of the core factors that keep us alive: our breath and our blood pressure.



What Is Your HOW?

Lesson: Reframing is powerful strategy.

Reframing helps you find alternatives to common thinking traps such as catastrophizing, black and white thinking, “should have, could have” regrets, jumping to conclusions and overgeneralizing.

“Here’s a real-life example of structural reframing: A patient was struggling in a marital relationship and was feeling that she could never get through to her husband. She began to “catastrophize,” too. The couple was not having any dialogue, they were just carrying out monologues, which continuously led to precisely the same outcome. The pair worked to learn structural reframing. This led the patient to realize that when she was catastrophizing, she was only listening to her own inner voice”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD



What Is Your HOW?

Lesson: The key is learning to find your stress switch.

“Truly, if you’re willing to find your “Stress Switch”, you will enter into the journey of exploration that you will command. The choice is yours. It is not something that has to be given to you. It is something that you can discover and use always. I have passed on some of that brain wisdom to my patients. Seeing them make use of their capacity insights and stress reduction skills is what gives me the greatest pleasure of all in my life.”

Dr. David Whitehouse, MD PhD

Stay up-to-date on all things mental health by listening to more Total Brain podcasts by the company’s founder Dr. Evian Gordan, PhD, MD

Listen Now



<https://www.buzzsprout.com/735944>

About Total Brain

Total Brain is a mental health and brain performance self-monitoring and self-care platform. Its SaaS platform enables self-monitoring of the 12 brain capacities that define mental health, as well as the risk of common mental health conditions. Total Brain also offers a self-care program made up of positive psychological tools, brain training tools, and breath and meditation tools and courses that help individuals maximize their mental health. With Total Brain, individuals can improve their self-awareness and brain performance, and companies can achieve better health outcomes, lower pharmaceutical claims, and improve employee performance and productivity. To learn more, visit www.totalbrain.com or follow us on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

