**Changing Your Physiology to Change Your Mind**

In order to perform your best, you need to be in the perfect state of mind.

That means that you need to have just the right chemical balance of neurotransmitters in order to be slightly aroused and alert but not to the point of being stressed to distraction. During times of relaxation, you of course want to tone down that stress to achieve a relaxed state of mind, which is also optimal for being creative.

You can use nootropics, brain training, visualization and more to achieve this, or you can rely on your natural cycles and simply choose the right *time* to work. Our body goes through natural cycles based on what we eat, what the weather is like and even our breathing.

But alternatively, you could also consider actively influencing these physiological factors in order to trigger the most desirable mental state for the given activity.

**The Role of Physiology**

You can also manipulate your physiology in order to alter your mental state and to change the way you feel and perform at any given time.

For example, if you wanted to be more alert and focussed, then you should *avoid* a heavy lunch. A heavy lunch requires energy simply to digest and as it triggers the release of feel-good endorphins, which also happen to be inhibitory neurotransmitters, it actually makes your brain more sluggish.

This is one reason that many people claim they feel more alert and focussed when they are in a fasted state (it possibly also has to do with the release of ketones, which are preferential for certain specific mental activities).

Conversely, if you find yourself becoming anxious and grumpy, then consider seeking out *more* food in order to fix that chemical balance.

Likewise, if you turn the temperature down slightly, then you will also increase your arousal. The colder you are, the faster you breathe and the faster the blood flows through your veins. You also produce significantly more norepinephrine and testosterone. This is why it can be such an effective tool to take a cold shower, to jump in a plunge pool, or even just to splash cold water on your face.

Another good way to *fight* the fight or flight response though and to restore your homeostasis/calm is to practice correct breathing. Correct breathing technique is often referred to as ‘belly breathing’ and it involves first relaxing the diaphragm and then allowing the stomach to expand as the lower portion of the lungs drop into it, before feeling up the top of the lungs and expanding the chest. This slower, fuller breathing can modulate the response of your parasympathetic nervous system in order to restore a sense of calm – especially if you make each breath longer and count for 4-5 seconds on every exhale and inhale. Next time you’re about to give a speech or do an interview, try this technique to calm your nerves.

**Master Your Emotion**

Many of us make the mistake of believing that our emotions arise from our thoughts, but more often it is our thoughts that arise from our emotions. And what do our emotions arise from? Our *feelings*. These have an evolutionary purpose remember, so they are all about driving us toward survival – finding food, resting when we can and avoiding danger.

If you’re having a bad day and you think the world kind of sucks, then before you do anything rash, ask if you might be over tired (which makes us groggy but eventually results in a fight or flight response), overly hungry or even *ill* which can create brain fog by causing inflammation via the release of pro-inflammatory cytokines.

Either way, look after your body if you want to have the best chance of controlling your mind and consider the context for how you’re feeling at any given time. The reason you can’t focus might even be because your belt is digging in…