**Ebbs and Flows in Your Productivity**

How do you get the very most out of your brain?

For many people, the obvious answer seems to be that they should find ways to hack it, to bend it to their will and to make sure that it operates as they wish at all times. Not feeling productive? Then the answer surely is to find ways to become more productive and focussed, to drive distracting thoughts out of your head and to fixate on what you’re doing.

But perhaps this isn’t the most effective strategy. Perhaps in fact, this is counterproductive.

Instead, what if you chose to let your mental state dictate your activities… so that when you felt focussed you worked on tasks that required focus? And when you felt relaxed, you instead spent time being creative.

**Ebbs and Flows**

You can use nootropics, CBT and other techniques to try and hijack your natural state and to force yourself to become more alert, more focussed or more awake.

But did you know that you actually *already* alternate between states of high focus and relaxation?

In fact, you can fairly accurately describe your mental state at any point as being somewhere on a single spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is the highly alert aroused state of acute stress (fight or flight) and at the other end of the spectrum is the far more relaxed and calm state of relaxation (rest and digest). We spend most of the time somewhere in-between (a state called homeostasis) but throughout the day we will shift slightly toward each extreme.

When you wake up in the morning for instance, you are in a fight or flight state. A state of arousal that is caused by low blood sugar – the result of effectively *fasting* through the night by not eating. This low blood sugar puts the body in a mild state of stress and encourages food-seeking behavior. This is further enhanced by morning light, which encourages the production of cortisol, to further increase arousal.

When you later eat, this causes a surge of sugar to enter the blood. The body absorbs this sugar and leaves behind a substance called tryptophan. Tryptophan is a building block of the ‘feel good hormone’ serotonin. And serotonin, in turn, gets broken down to create melatonin – the sleep hormone. That’s why we feel tireder and less effective after eating.

What’s also interesting is that these states of mental arousal and relative relaxation also correlate with the physical, hormonal states of ‘catabolism’ and ‘anabolism’. When we are excited, our body burns energy stored as fat to use as energy. But when we are relaxed, it takes the opportunity to rebuild tissue and heal wounds.

Exercise increases arousal but triggers a subsequent anabolic (rest and digest) state. Of course, fear puts us into an extreme state of fight or flight/arousal. Adenosine builds up throughout the day, slowing down our thoughts and edging us toward neural inhibition and the release of GABA (another inhibitory neurotransmitter).

**What to do With This Information**

So why is this relevant? The answer is simple: if you want to get the best form your brain, you can do so by working out your natural ebbs and flows and the times you work best. Instead of trying to force your brain into arousal, why not identify when you are alert and then get to work?