

How to trick your brain doing hard things?

Have you ever wondered why it's so easy to spend hours scrolling social media but why it's so hard to stay focused studying? Let me explain that with dopamine.

Dopamine is the brain chemical of anticipation because you're expecting a reward. It's a part of the brain reward system. And it's the reason why you can't focus for a long period of time, why you lack the motivation to work on things that could have a great impact on your life whereas you can scroll Tiktok for hours. But let's start from the beginning.

In the day and age of the first human, dopamine gave the motivation for eating, hunting, reproducing and nothing much. But then, humanity discover other triggers for the reward system... drugs, porn, gambling machine, video games and finally 🎮 social media 🎮. All this kind of entertainment produces a lot of dopamine and create a strong motivation for those activities. This can create a sort of chemical imbalance in our brain. So, to stabilize itself, the brain will involve one of its best skills: adaptation and more precisely it will adapt through tolerance.

The tolerance effect explains why an alcoholic need more alcohol to be drunk compared to a normal drinker. Or at a smaller scale, this can explain why the last bite of your favorite food is neither as good as the first.

Let's apply this idea to dopamine, the more you consume high dopamine activities, the more you will need a high dopamine activity to get stimulated and motivated. This is a vicious circle that modify your baseline level of happiness and motivation. In other word, you will lose motivation to accomplished low dopamine activities such as studying or meditating. Deep focusing on those things will become really hard as some studies showed that 90% of distraction are internal, come from ourselves. The motivation to stay focus is so low that your attention can't stabilize, even if you know those activities are much more important than scrolling Tiktok. This can create negative feelings, especially if you compare yourself to some YouTube productivity god. But they're not gods, you're not lazy, it's just different tolerance level, different baseline! So, you may be thinking "ok ok how can I reduce tolerance, is there a way to reset my brain" and yes there is a solution and it's called dopamine detox!

By removing any high dopamine activities during a certain amount of time, you can rewire your brain the other way around to get back motivation, productivity, and self-confidence. Doing this suddenly is pretty hard but you can choose to go step by step too. It means no Netflix, no porn, no social media, no junk food. And this will be boring but in one week the desire to doing such things will disappear and boredom will force you to engage in low dopamine activities as there will be nothing more stimulating in your environment. Checking thing in your to-do will make you accomplish, you may start to feel calmer, thinking clearer, being more center, more present...

Now that you know the principle and the existence of Dopamine. You may be able to identify more precisely the thing that private you from being motivated. Cause remember, dopamine fasting is the most radical way to deal with that as it removes all the possible source of Dopamine imbalance. It can first help you to identify the problem, but then it will be easier to focus on something more precise. We know that doing sport boost the mood, that social media create anxiety, that massive entertainment is sometime a way to avoid addressing emotion or mental illness. There are many paths to achieve productivity and it's your role to find the best for you

** Here is a part of the original presentation. It was very interesting, but it was making my speaking time too long**

But what's a strong motivation, at what level can it control our action?

Some researcher did an experiment with rats, they made a lever that directly activate through electrodes the nucleus accumbens, a part of the reward system. So, when the rat pressed the lever, it instantly got the equivalent of a dopamine shoot in his brain. Those rats became so motivated of pressing the lever that they did it even if there was an electrified grid at their foot, receiving continuous shock. They became so lazy that they did not walk to get food at the opposite of the cage but still eat it when placed directly in their mouth. This experiment demonstrates that our reward system, without any substances, can have full control on our action even if those action can be bad for our body.

Don't worry, without the use of addictive chemicals, this don't append to human because our brain got an incredible superpower: plasticity! Plasticity is the brain capacity to rewire itself and adapt to new situation. It's pretty useful to learn new hard things like reading, walking with a prosthesis but it also permits us to develop tolerance effect.

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