

Habits Of A Happy Brain Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Habits Of A Happy Brain explains the four neurotransmitters in your brain that create happiness, why you can't be happy all the time, and how you can rewire your brain by taking responsibility for your own hormones and thus, happiness.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



When you read books about self-improvement topics, like love, productivity or happiness, you're bound to bump into chemistry at some point. The most diligent researchers are all eventually led deep into the wirings of the human mind, and many of them have uncovered how some of the key chemicals inside our brain work for or against us.

As I kept reading about happiness, I stumbled across the hormones connected with it one by one and over time. For example, I learned about endorphins in school, while James Altucher taught me about oxytocin. Later I found out that dopamine is another happiness hormone, and most recently that serotonin completed the set.

Since these are the four major chemicals in determining our happiness, I was surprised that no one had written a book about all of them yet. Well, *Habits Of A Happy Brain* is that book. Loretta Breuning is a former professor from California State University East Bay, writer, researcher and guide at the Oakland Zoo, showing people how to manage their own inner mammal based on social behavior among animals.

Here are 3 lessons from *Habits Of A Happy Brain*:

1. Unhappy chemicals are just as important as happy ones.
2. Nothing will make you happy forever.
3. To live means to choose constantly, so it's important that you do.

Want to learn more about the biology of happiness? You've come to the right place, let's go!

Lesson 1: The chemicals that make you unhappy are equally as important as the happy ones.

The four chemicals of happiness serve different purposes, like rewarding you for being social (oxytocin), going after a reward (dopamine) or pushing through physical pain (endorphins) at different times. Naturally, we spend a lot of our waking lives chasing after them in one way or another, whether we're aware of it or not.

However, in our quest for happiness, we tend to forget that the other side of the coin is equally as important: **unhappy chemicals protect us from harm by warning us of potential threats.**

For example, when you're hungry, cortisol is released, a stress hormone which makes you feel uncomfortable and gets you to find food. The reason we often think of these unhappy chemicals as problematic lies not in the basic system that they're a part of, but in the way our modern brain, the neocortex, breaks that system.

Cortisol is what gives you that "do something" feeling when you feel threatened, but since your neocortex constantly analyzes your surroundings rationally and sees risk around every corner (because true, life-threatening risks have become so rare), you're in "do something" mode a lot more than is good for you – and that's why we eat out of boredom, for example.

Lesson 2: There is nothing in this world that will keep making you happy forever.

But even if we could get our hormone system to work perfectly in sync with our rational thinking, that wouldn't make us permanently happy. Permanent happiness, a continuous state of bliss, is nothing more than a myth.

That's why constantly chasing happiness is a useless game – even if you won \$10 million, that would not be the end of your happiness journey.

Why?

Because of a process called *habituation*. Every time your happiness chemicals are released, your brain makes a note about the strategy that led you there and files it away under "this makes me happy." This way, your brain can default to the same strategy next time, but sadly, it won't bring the same result, due to habituation. **An experience makes you most happy when it's new**, so when you go to the same, awesome restaurant the second time, it won't live up to your high expectations and not be as much fun.

We get used to everything, which is the reason someone who's paralyzed is as happy as someone who wins the lottery, one year later.

You might think habituation sucks, but it's what helped us survive. Sitting around and enjoying the stuff we have doesn't help us grow or get better, and **habituation is what gets us up and exploring**, instead of falling into a vicious cycle of high expectations and disappointments.

Lesson 3: Life is a series of constant choices, so it's important to not let others choose for you.

Our brains have become very complex, and because there are so few real risks left out there, it keeps coming up with its own, overblown sense of what's truly risky and what's not.

However, **being alive means constantly choosing whether it's worth to give up one thing in favor of another**. Right this second, I'm choosing to write this, and postponing going home to cook dinner with my roommate. Every single choice you make comes with some risk and some opportunity cost – so you might as well get used to it.

The only real mistake you can make is to not choose at all. Sure, when you let your boss, your wife, your friends, your parents decide for you, you'll never have to take any blame and can always point to someone else, who's at fault.

But out of all decisions, that's the only one that'll truly make you unhappy, because you gain a lot from knowing you're in control, no matter whether the outcome of any given choice you made was a release of happy chemicals, or unhappy ones.

Habits Of A Happy Brain Review

Habits Of A Happy Brain went deep and at the same time managed to explain everything in a way I could understand – which is rare. Also, since it's the only book I could find (so far) on all four happiness hormones simultaneously, it really makes it a one-stop-shop for learning about the biology of happiness. Highly recommended!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What all things, that trigger you happy chemicals, have in common
- When dopamine and endorphin are most critical to be released
- Why moms need oxytocin and how you won't want to admit your rush of serotonin
- How your experiences physically alter the structure of your brain and when that process reaches its height
- Why it's never too late to rewire your brain and how long it takes

Who would I recommend the Habits Of A Happy Brain summary to?

The 23 year old college student, who wishes she could always remain a student, sleep in, relax and “stay happy”, the 43 year old lottery winner, who’s gotten bored with all of his material belongings, and anyone who often finds themselves thinking “this is my boss’s fault”.