

Keeping a Nootropics Log

Mastering the Subtleties

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Introduction

A lot of people who are into some sort of “biohacking” tend to track many things: macro-nutrients, heart rate, sleep, exercise, etc. But here we are, nootropics users—some of us playing with fire, so to speak—and yet, very few of us keep any written records of this.

There’s a wide spectrum of people in this community ranging from those who use nootropics without much thought, swallowing them like candy, to those who do careful research about each substance, read every study they can find, and take them only when they need to perform on top of their game. The majority is somewhere in the middle and with this article, I aim to push you to the more thoughtful side.

Today, I’ll be talking about the importance and methods of keeping a detailed nootropics log.

However, there are two levels of involvement you can choose from:

- keeping a simple log with the intent of understanding basic effects of each substance, or
- going to the next level and doing very focused studies for each substance, *in various situations* with the goal of discovering the more subtle, yet very influential effects. (I’ll explain what I mean later in this article.)

By doing this, you will benefit the most in social situations, high-pressure, stressful situations and times where you have to do sit down and do focused, productive work.

Alright, let’s dive in.

Keeping a Log

“If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.” —Peter Drucker

Keeping a log is how you clearly start to see the patterns and discover effects of each substance. That’s mainly why you would do this.

I do it in a simple, but detailed manner; you need nothing more than a plain .txt file or a simple markup format like Markdown or **Zim** (that’s what I use). Lots of people like to get fancy with spreadsheets—go for it if you want; I find plain text just fine.

Start Notepad, vim, Evernote, Zim, or whatever notetaking tool you use and save a new file/note called “nootropics log” or something.

Now, let me show you an excerpt from my log on the day I first combined L-theanine with green tea (caffeine being the main psychoactive compound in it) so you can see the format I use and what my log looks like on a normal day when I take something:

Excerpt from my log (my first time taking theanine & green tea)
2016/10/29
1022 | Woke up after ~3h of sleep to go [...]
1645 | Drinking a cup of @greentea (1.8tsp of gunpowder leaves in 280ml cup) with 200mg @theanine added in the cup.
1651 T+00:00 | Green tea, 2nd infusion of the same leaves, about 60% of the cup + another 100mg of theanine added. I could taste the added theanine super-clearly in the tea.
1703 T+00:12 | I think I may already be feeling it. This typical warming (not really warming temperature-wise, but kinda just this light, warmish feeling) 'glow' feeling in my body and mental calmness. I feel slightly amazing.
1707 T+00:16 | I think it's seriously starting to kick in.
1810-1827(now) T+01:36 | @caffeine benefits for the first time ever without the bad stuff. This shit is absolutely incredible, I am typing this text at a ridiculous speed. I feel like everything about me is faster effortlessly.
1901 T+02:10 | Still going I think, slightly started falling off maybe
1943 T+02:54 | Caffeine jitters/anxiety is kicking in, but a lot less than usually.
2000 | Eating those fried things (potatoes, eggs, lard) that [my roommate] made
2015 | Arrived out, plenty of my crew there, I was in state as soon as I got there. I was a lot more on fire and crazy than usually. I think it's the noots. I felt quite altered but in an amazing fucking way.
~2130 | Out with friends, they are freezing and saying it's cold (it's 10C), I'm like what's wrong with you guys, it's just right. Not sure if it's due to cold adaptation practice or noots. Gotta study this @thermogenesis effect more, but not in the nootropics context, rather with ketosis, food and earlier cold/warmth exposure during the day, etc.
2145 | Feeling quite altered, not in a bad nor good way, it's just different. It's cuz 3h of sleep and caffeine +theanine stack. Never felt like this, but it's in no way super-strange in a bad way.
2154 | Sleepy
NOTE: That awesome socialness may've also been influenced by EGCG, which is an HDAC inhibitor, which may or may not have any psychoactive effects, especially at these doses. Just a random thought, I should research this.

Figure 1: Excerpt from my log

So, we start with a simple date each day. Then, for each entry, you

put in the time, a separator like the pipe character (|) that I use, and then the log entry; describe what you've taken or what effects you felt.

At the end of the day, I may add some additional thoughts by adding a NOTES section at the end. You may also keep track of tags like I do with the *at* (@) character. It's something that can help you with finding specific terms in your log.

And it's simple as that.

I know a lot of you came here mainly to pick up the techniques of keeping a log, like what app do I use, which spreadsheet columns, and such. Many came looking for this magic bullet that's gonna make tracking effortless. Nothing will because there's no such thing—this still takes work.

I just showed you how to keep an effective, yet simple log. You have no excuse for not doing it anymore; go start one.

Discovering Effects

I love comparing this to a mechanic in the videogame Skyrim, if you've ever played it. As you play and go through the world, you collect various "ingredients" for potions such as different types of flowers, salts, animal parts, etc., and when you consume an ingredient by itself, you discover one of its four magical effects.

This is awfully similar to nootropics. However, you first need to be sensitive enough to notice those effects.

Self-Awareness

Most people are too unaware of their mental state. If you've ever given some nootropics to a friend of yours who isn't into this, chances are they didn't even feel it, but still somehow magically got a lot more done that day. There's a lot of anecdotal evidence like this, just look it up online.

Too many people are just stuck in "auto-pilot mode", not being present enough to experience life with awareness of every sensory input they receive. Being so unaware every waking moment of your life for so long makes you numb to how you feel, to where your mind is at.

If there's anything two years of mindfulness meditation have done to me, it's that it made me incredibly aware of my mind state. If you feel like you need improvement in this area, I'd recommend this: while you're sober (hopefully most of the time, or at least while doing this), try just focusing on how sobriety feels, so to speak. It's not something you can describe, but if you just bring that much more awareness to your daily life, you may start to develop this sense of your mental state.

As a nootropics user, I assume you have a degree of self-awareness about your health and your cognitive performance that's above average. Therefore, I would *highly* recommend that you do mindfulness meditation daily. I find ten minutes a day to be the sweet spot, especially if you're quite busy. I *urge* you to get on this for the benefits are immense, not just in regards to this awareness, but in many other mental aspects such as self-control and resistance to stress.

I recently wrote [an in-depth post](#) as a reply to someone on reddit that explains how to get into meditation and how to successfully make it a daily habit, so you might want to check that out; I really recommend you do.

The Basics

In the introduction, I said there are two levels of doing this: doing just enough to have a reasonable log you can look back on and see basic patterns over time, and then there's the next level, the going-all-out, I-wanna-master-this-stuff level.

Let's start with the basics first, though.

Your goal, on this basic level, is to have a list of each substance's effects. Sounds simple, right? Let's take a look at my own list of perceived effects of L-theanine, as an example.

Perceived effects

Effects I've noticed from my personal experience of taking L-theanine, both in isolation and in stacks. Check out [the nootropics log](#) for detailed logs.

In isolation

Orally: Kicks in about 40min in properly, peaks 60–80min after taking

Sublingually: Kicks in faster, peaks faster, lasts less. Gotta quantify this.

Confirmed effects

- Mental calmness and mindfulness
- Increased focus / decreased distractability; decreased attention to things you're not focusing on.
- Slightly sedating / makes me sleepy, but not in a way that it interferes with alertness or focus at all.
- Improved social stuff. Gotta study this more to be more specific about what aspect exactly it improves.

Unconfirmed effects (still being tested, may or may not be true)

- Time perception alteration, less time passes than it actually feels
- Improved sleep quality? Maybe, gonna have to test this when taking it at night/evening.
- 'Fuck it, let's do it' type of fearlessness
- Reduced motor control accuracy or something, maybe just feels different? It's that looseness.
- Pulling back my sleep / making me sleepy earlier in the evening? Directly correlates with the dose?
- Reduced libido? I think not.

Stacked with green tea

Main psychoactive compounds: caffeine, more theanine, and EGCG *maybe* (7.3g of EGCG per 100g of tea leaves)

Confirmed effects

- Warmth-like, glowy, very pleasant feeling in the body. D

isassociated and loose body movements but in a nice-feeling, good way.

Unconfirmed effects (still being tested, may or may not be true)

- Massively out of my head and 'in the world' and very expressive as opposed to being in my head thinking, being self-conscious, etc. Happened 2/2 times so far. Will confirm if it happens a few more times, but already pretty confident it's repeatable.

Figure 2: Perceived effects of L-theanine

Quite a bit going on, don't you think?

On the basic level, you want to have a file/note for each substance. In it, you have a list of confirmed effects that happen each time you administer that substance. The second list is unconfirmed effects, it's those that you think are caused by the substance, but you aren't sure is that the case.

So far, this is simple stuff. I hope you can see the benefits now. With this list, you know exactly and precisely what each substance does to you, and you roughly know which to administer for what purpose.

I want you to try this out.

And, ideally, right now, because you seem to have time to read this article, so you may as well do this with me as you read.

Go create a new file/note next to your nootropics log named “Piracetam”, “INI”, “Rhodiola”, or whatever nootropic you may be interesting in exploring first.

You then spend some time sober if you’ve been a daily nootropics user, and then start taking your nootropic in isolation and be prepared to note down everything you feel. Every few minutes, write your findings in the log, noting down what time is it for each entry so you know at what point what effects hit you. Eventually, you read through your log and write what you felt into the unconfirmed effects list.

As you take this nootropic again and again, and log what you feel, you eventually start seeing patterns in your log, and with time, you’re able to confirm certain effects that show up with each intake.

As a side-note, be mindful of the tolerance and withdrawal effects if you take that nootropic daily; log those as well, but try to be aware of the differences between withdrawal effects and other non-nootropic-caused discomforts, like bad food or low sleep.

That’s it, really, but if you want to go deeper down the rabbit hole, read on.

Mastering the Subtleties

To really push this to the next level, we start studying substances *for a particular purpose*, over a longer time period.

Here’s what I mean.

Choose just one nootropic you wish to master. Then, have a few situations you wish to test it in, like social or highly stressful situations. Then, administer that nootropic and put yourself in that situation so you can study its effects *for that very situation*.

The goal you’re trying to achieve with logging is, for any given substance, creating a list of its effects on a number of situations you find yourself in.

This gives you the benefit of knowing in advance *the subtle, but influential* effects of each substance in various situations. That very

thing is what we're aiming to do.

Here's exactly how to do it.

You administer a certain substance in isolation, in a specific situation, and you log what happens, thus discovering its potential effects in that very situation. You keep doing this many times for each situation that you want improvements in, you keep removing non-repeatable effects, discovering new, very subtle and specific ones, and with time, you keep developing this list that now has many properties of that substance.

You can then do this whole process for each separate stack of ingredients. In my example, I used to drink green tea by itself in the past, but it would just make me stressed after 1.5–3h. Then I started taking L-theanine, also in isolation, and eventually learned of its anxiolytic effects, among many others. Then, I combined it with green tea, and discovered new effects that *only show up when you combine the two* (like being more expressive and less in my head in social situations). This is what's known as *synergistic effects*.

It's at this very point that the true power of logging and detailed, long study becomes apparent; you quantify things. You write down everything. You start seeing the patterns and start confirming more and more repeatable effects, while removing the unrepeatable ones.

You now possess vast, nuanced knowledge about that particular nootropic you studied. That's mastery, and with it, you now have great power to alter your performance in a great range of scenarios, with very specific effects of your choosing. Now, that's true power.

Afterword

I tend to have a bit of this dramatic writing style, but don't be swayed by it—every word is here for a reason.

This stuff changed my game. I've spent immense amounts of time studying nothing but L-theanine, and the knowledge of its effects that are slowly coming to light has been invaluable to me. The recent addition of green tea to my stack has made this so much more interesting for a vast, new range of effects just opened up, ripe for more exploration. Nootropics are such a rich and deep hobby, and I haven't even scratched the surface—there are countless substances I have yet to try. This is what makes nootropics one of my passions; it's that depth that keeps it engaging, not to mention the powerful benefits of the effects themselves.

Thank you for your time. I hope this takes your nootropics game to the next level, just make sure not to let this be another one of those oh-that-was-cool-but-I'm-too-busy articles that you read online. Actually *do* this. You know you can benefit greatly from it.

Credits

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Written in Markdown with ghostwriter on Ubuntu. PDF typesetting done with Xe_{La}TeX in TeXstudio. Typefaces used are TeXGyreSchola and Source Code Pro.

Also, massive shout-out to the crew on [/r/nootropics's Discord server](#) for being awesome and enduring my dumb jokes, and [/r/nootropics](#) for being such a brilliant community.