



Transcript of “Helen Irlen: Irlen Syndrome, & Visual Stimuli on Brain Performance - #181”

Bulletproof Radio podcast #181



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Dave: Hey, it's Dave Asprey of Bulletproof Radio. I already recommend that you decrease the amount of artificial light you're exposed to at night so that you sleep better, but now studies are showing that more exposure to light at night might increase depression. This is probably because it disrupts your sleep and your circadian rhythms. If you need to be exposed to lights at night, try to use lights in the red spectrum or maybe amber, which will affect your sleep less than white or blue lights.

In my case, I actually have red LEDs mounted above my desk. In the shower, in all the bathrooms in our house, we actually have a red light plumbed in. If you're going to take a shower before bed or early in the morning, having that red light can really make a difference, and it means that when you get up to pee, nothing disturbs your sleep; you go right back to sleep. Even more precious, when my five-year-old Alan gets up to go to the bathroom, he goes back to sleep without waking me up, and that rocks.

Speaking of guests, today's guest is Helen Irlen. Helen is a friend and she's a past guest on the show. She's also the woman who invented the technology that taught me that amber glasses gave me twenty-five percent of my brainpower back or sometimes more. If you've seen me in my cool biohacker glasses, especially under bright fluorescent lights, it was Helen's research that explained why this made such a difference for me and helped me know what to do to reclaim a huge amount of my brainpower.

Helen talked to us at the [Bulletproof Conference](#) about the Irlen Syndrome, what it is and what the symptoms are and how common it is. Forty-eight percent of people have light spectrums that are making them weak, and when they correct that with lenses, they feel amazing. You don't have to wear the lenses all the time, just when you're going to suck the most energy out of your brain. She's also going to share with us what our high-tech world is doing to our brain. You're going to get every

little thing you ever wanted to know about those funky glasses that I wear. It's not just that I'm in training to be a rock star.

Enjoy the show with Helen. She's an amazing innovator. She's been doing this for more decades than I can imagine, and I have great, great respect for her work. I'm just so honored to have her on the show again.

Speaker 2: You've been on the show before, but for those listening in for the first time, what is Irlen Syndrome?

Helen: Irlen Syndrome is basically looking at the fact that there are people today who, because we're so high-tech and we're living with fluorescent lights and computer screens and high-def television sets and whiteboards in schools, computer screens where you have to look into fluorescent lighting and reading and doing visually intensive activities, that's all we're doing. We're not outside. We're not agricultural anymore. There are people who as a result of that are under stress. Their brain is under stress, and that's triggering array of physical symptoms and distortions that they may not be aware of that affects performance, attention, concentration, and their immune system, which would be creating fatigue for some people.

Speaker 2: Before we talk about the solution to Irlen Syndrome, help us understand some of the key facts about how Irlen Syndrome affects the population at large.

Helen: Okay. That's a great question. It doesn't affect the whole population. It's only a segment of the population that their brain is unable to process visual information accurately. I want to take a step back and make sure people understand. It's not your eyes that has to process visual information. Your eye is the camera that directs the information to the brain. It's your brain that counts, and it's your brain that has to read and process information. Your brain controls how you think, how you feel, how you act, and how you perform. Therefore, you want the best brain possible that's not under stress. For some people, lighting; it can be sunlight, fluorescent lights, bright lights, headlights at night, the brightness off of white paper, computer screens and whiteboards is causing a problem.

Speaker 2: What are the symptoms that people have with Irlen Syndrome?

Helen: It does vary from individual to individual, and that's because we all have our own unique brains. It can be eyestrain or pain. It can be even headaches, migraines, nauseous, dizziness, tiredness, sleepiness, can be physical symptoms. People may not be aware of the fact when they're looking at something that it's not clear and it's not- or stable, and it may not be comfortable. If you've always lived your life that way, you're not aware that you have a problem. You think that's normal. We're trying to educate people and saying, wait a minute, you're not dumb or stupid. You shouldn't be blaming yourself. Maybe it's just your brain and we need to take the stress off your brain and correct it.

Speaker 2: I know that some people have LASIK and have side effects with haloming and shadowing. Is that related to Irlen Syndrome at all?

Helen: What happens with LASIK for some people is they actually become light-sensitive and they do have the symptoms that you're talking about. Some people inherit those symptoms as part of the Irlen Syndrome. You can inherit these symptoms or you can acquire them from LASIK surgery, autoimmune diseases, head traumas, concussions, TBIs.

Speaker 2: You've talked about this a bit, but can you tell us more what our high-tech world is doing to our brain?

Helen: Yeah. It's not doing a whole lot of good things to our brain. It's actually over-stressing your brain. White or light is basically composed of all the colors of the rainbow. If your eyes are open, your brain is being flooded by light. There are certain of those colors or wavelengths of light where the timing is coming in; it's just the wrong timing. It's like static for your brain just as if you were hearing static and you were trying to listen to what's happening and there's so much static you would get annoyed and aggravated. It would be hard to do it. The brain is reacting in the same way when light waves of light are not coming in in the right timing, and it's stressing really hard to try to process it and it's not doing a very good job of doing it.

Speaker 2: How do bright glare, fluorescent lighting, bright colors, high contrast, complex patterns, and even print size, style, and format affect our brain's ability to perform at its best?

Helen: Yeah. You listed a lot of the things that can create stress for one's brain that we can correct so they're not stressful anymore. Some people are aware that they look at stripes and stripes are jiggling or moving, certain fluorescent colors are not comfortable for them to look at. You look away, you don't pay attention to it, you don't think about it. Print size makes a difference. We see children in school who seem to do well until they get to third grade, and then all of a sudden the parents are going, "I have a bright child, but why is the child struggling with reading?" Print size decreases and the amount of print increases on the page. Same way when we get into cursive. Cursive is much more difficult to read and creates difficulties and problems.

Speaker 2: What is the tangible impact of hidden stressors on our performance?

Helen: It affects your ability to perform. It can affect speed, fluency, accuracy, and length of time. When you have stressors, the longer you do it, the harder you try, the worse it gets. That becomes a problem because you have to stop, you have to take breaks. You may think, oh, there's something wrong with me, why I'm taking so much longer than somebody else. You may get misdiagnosed with ADD or ADHD. You don't want medication; you want to have a solution that's non-evasive and is not putting medication into your system.

Speaker 2: What are some visually intensive activities that act as stressors to our brain?

Helen: Reading, whether you're reading textbooks, you're reading on the computer, on your iPads today; even iPhones is one visually intensive activity. Copying, even writing, doing math calculations. Interesting, reading music, you have lots of little notes on lines. I had one musician who was very talented come to me, and I said, "What are you doing?" He says, "Well, I had to become a piano tuner." When I got the right colored overlay, and we'll talk about that in a minute, and I put it on the musical lines, he just looked at me and said, "You mean the notes aren't

supposed to be moving in time to the music?" He had given up his whole career because he didn't know that he had a problem and didn't know that there was a solution.

Speaker 2: What is visual perception disorder?

Helen: Visual perception disorder just says that your brain is having difficulty processing visual information. It can affect speed, flow and fluency, and comprehension.

Speaker 2: Why should visual perception disorder be taken seriously in schools and in the workplace?

Helen: It's very important to identify the type of visual perceptual problem that we deal with, which is different and, therefore, we've called it Irlen Syndrome. It's going to impact your performance. It's going to create physical symptoms, and it's going to affect your ability to achieve. That's your dreams, your career, and your life, so it's critically important. The younger we can pick this up and address the issue so the child isn't struggling, so that the adult can stay in the job and perform well, not go home so tired or exhausted, need to take so many breaks. It's very important for your performance.

Speaker 2: Why does the Irlen Syndrome disorder impact the entire body? Or how does the Irlen Syndrome disorder impact the entire body?

Helen: If you think about your brain, your brain is connected to your spinal cord and your nervous system, so anything that's happening in your brain is going to go through your whole nervous system. Therefore, if the brain is under stress, some people get headaches, other people eyestrain and pain. It goes to all your organs, nauseous and dizziness. It can occur in any part of your body. You want to get rid of all the physical symptoms, not just some. You want to make it not just a little bit better. We can make it totally better.

Speaker 2: What is the Irlen Institute's position on the mind-body learning connection?

- Helen: That's exactly what we're doing. The position is that there is a connection between the mind, the body, and learning and performance. You take care of your mind, and that helps your body and that helps your performance.
- Speaker 2: What are those funny rose-colored glasses that Dave wears and how are they and the science behind them the solution to Irlen Syndrome?
- Helen: His rock star glasses. I love his rock star glasses. What's interesting is because everybody's brain is different, everyone wears a different color. This is one of the solutions that we use so that we keep the brain protected a hundred percent of the time. It doesn't matter what the lighting conditions are. You can be driving at night and headlights won't bother you. You can be sitting in classes and lectures, at work under fluorescent lighting, and it stays comfortable. Everybody's color is different.
- That's the art and science of what we do is to figure out which of those colors or wavelengths of light, the timing is not correct, and filter just those, just the amount we need to. You can see we've done brain scans that we calm the whole brain down, that calms the whole neurological system down. People just go, oh, that's so comfortable. But if you've never had that baseline of comfort, you don't know that's what it's supposed to be like. We have to create for each person their own unique color for this to really be effective.
- Speaker 2: Do the lenses have UV protection? Are the lenses something that are supposed to be worn all the time?
- Helen: For a lot of people, because of the one-on-one correlation between sunlight, fluorescent lights, bright lights, some people even dim lighting and then reading and doing any visual activities. Most people wear them from the time they get up until they go to bed at night. Even, like I said, headlights are a problem. I will add one thing we didn't talk about, that for some people depth perception can be a problem. They think, oh, it's okay. I just have problems and I have to hesitate getting on and off escalators. It's really stressful to turn left in front of oncoming traffic.

Changing lanes is a little bit difficult for me. That's all stress. Your paying a price all the time, and that shouldn't be.

Speaker 2: Do the lenses have UV protection?

Helen: UV. The lenses, some do and some don't. What we find very interesting is that UV is just part of what they call the wavelengths of light. It's just the invisible part of the spectral band. There are actually people that UV creates problems and difficulties. We use it unless it's creating a problem for the individual's brain.

Speaker 2: Why are you not wearing colored lenses?

Helen: Oh, I love that question. I think I would never have discovered this if I actually had these problems. The way I discovered it was working with adults who had made it to a four-year university and were still struggling. I wanted to find out what were the questions that we weren't asking and that stayed with an individual for a lifetime and inhibited, again, their performance and ability to function.

In interviewing the adults, I started asking some very significant questions, such as tell me about reading, not when you start but when you get to that point that you want to stop. How do things look and how do things feel? I was hearing reported, "Words are jiggling. Words are moving off the page. Things are flashing at me." I was relating to my own experience that I never see any of those things. Had I seen those things, had reading caused stress and strain, I probably would have said, "That's just normal. It's like that for everybody." But I knew that I was a long-term strong reader and I read for hours and hours on end, and I just wanted to make everybody like me because it would make it so much easier and better for them.

Speaker 2: What can our listeners do today to test themselves for a visual perception disorder?

Helen: There's a number of things. One is the website, www.irlen.com, I-R-L-E-N.com. We have self-tests. We have long self-tests; we have a self-test if you have headaches. We even have self-tests because this can affect

children and adults who have been diagnosed with autism and Asperger's syndrome, and they're different self-tests. I'd suggest getting online, taking a self-test, self-identify if you have a problem or not. On the website, there are little glasses up at the top with different colors, and you can punch on them and it changes the color of the background. You can try reading with different colors and see if any of them make it feel better, make it easier than the white page.

People blame themselves when they don't understand that this is an issue. They think it's their fault. One of the things that I always say, especially to children, is, "You know what, it's not your fault. You get to blame either your mom or your dad or both because you inherited the problem."

Speaker 2: Once people start wearing the new lenses, how quickly do they feel a change?

Helen: Immediately, and I'll say that again. The change is immediate. Nothing is supposed to be immediate, but the change is absolutely immediate. We've been doing this for thirty-plus years, so we know that the change sustains itself over time. When I first did the research, the adults said to me, "Don't change it. Don't show us how much better it can be if it's not going to stay that way."

Speaker 2: How can our listeners get more information about self-testing, Irlen lenses, and a biomenal modification?

Helen: Let's go to the website is one. That's Irlen.com. I have written two books, *The Irlen Revolution* and *Reading by the Colors*. You can just get onto the web and you're going to get a whole bunch of information about this.

Speaker 2: How is the [Bulletproof Biohacking Conference](#) important to you personally and to the work that you do for other people?

Helen: I love this conference. I think everything you're doing is fabulous because it helps people find natural ways to improve themselves so that they have peak performance, and that's what's really important so

they're not sitting around and blaming themselves, they're not struggling, and they're not paying a price. This is a wonderful conference for being able to showcase all the different things that can help an individual to improve that individual.

Speaker 2: Finally, what are your top three recommendations for biohacking and biomenal stressors?

Helen: First of all, I think you need to start paying attention to your body. I think we ignore it or we just assume it's normal. I've had so many children sit there, and when I ask do they get headaches, they say, "Oh, yes." Mom says, "Well, you never told me." The child says, "Yes, I did, but you get headaches so you just told me everybody gets headaches." Don't dismiss it. Pay attention to your body, pay attention to how much effort you're putting out there.

Two, you can make simple modifications to your environment, which a lot of people are already doing. I would recommend incandescent lighting, but we can't do that. I want to get rid of the myth. One myth out there is that if you read in dim lighting, it will hurt your eyes. That's a myth. For the people I've worked with, usually dim lighting is much better than bright lights. All right? Fluorescent lighting is not great, but at least full spectrum is better than just full fluorescent. The reason we have fluorescent lighting and all the things that are stressors for my population is that the majority of the population doesn't find them stressful at all. They look and say, gee, fluorescent lighting is good. Let's just make it brighter and brighter because for them, they think brighter is better. No, it's worse.

We started out with blackboards with white chalk. The reverse is actually easier to read. It doesn't create optical illusions. Then we went to greenboards. Now what do we have? Whiteboards. Computer screens now have fluorescent lights, and you're looking at them. You can modify your computer screen. You can dim it down. You can change the color of the background. You need to play with your environment. The benefit for Irlen is the fact you don't have to modify your environment at all. It calms it down without having to do anything and without changing the color of anything in your environment.

Speaker 2: Helen, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Helen: Thank you. It's been a delight.

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