

Daily Habits That Power Up & Change Your Brain – Daniel Amen, M.D. – #1032

Dave Asprey.

You're listening to The Human Upgrade with Dave Asprey. Today I am interviewing one of my favorite people in the world who's created a revolution about understanding what's happening in your brain. And it's my friend, Dr. Daniel Amen. I wanted to have him on because he's gone deep on biology, and right now, Smarter Not Harder, my new book just hit shelves, and I've mentioned his work in the book, as I have in many of my other books, because why would you want to improve something you can't measure? So, given that we have a guy on the show today with more than 200,000 SPECT scans of people's brains, he's going to teach us how to change your brain every day. I feel like maybe, Daniel, you don't need any further introduction, but for people who don't know, 40 years of clinical practice.

You're a psychiatrist, clinical neuroscientist, and you've looked at patients from 155 countries, including some very well-known ones who publicly talk about your work, like Miley Cyrus and others. So, thanks for coming back on the show, my friend. You'll be setting a record. This is your sixth time on the show and you've earned every one of them.

Daniel Amen, M.D.:

Hey Dave, love you, love your work. So grateful that we have been connected all of these years. And I love your new book. So, congratulations.

Dave:

Thank you, Daniel. That's high praise given who you are and what you do. What do you think about the idea of a meat operating system, this idea that there's something running in your body, maybe even before the brain gets a signal?

Daniel:

Well, it's so fascinating. In fact, if your gut is not right, you don't think right. And nobody thinks like that. And I love the idea of the brain is lazy. And if you can sort of lean into that, then you can get your biology going in a better direction.

Dave:

You can. Now, what I want listeners to do is I want them to get your newest book, Change Your Brain Every Day. And I want them to order it. And guys, I want you to order it right now because I interview a lot of authors, I don't always tell you to order the book right then. I will tell you, I have never regretted reading any one of Dr. Amen's books. And I want you to order it right now because Smarter Not Harder and Change Your Brain need to be right next to each other on Amazon. And that's why I'm bringing it all up, because the algorithms work that way. And I want to understand, Dr. Amen. Why did you write this book now?

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Daniel:

So, Change Your Brain Every Day. I came to believe, I believe, that brain and mental health are daily practices. So, just like spiritual health, physical health, you have to do this stuff every day. And every day you're making your brain better by the behaviors you engage in, the air you breathe, the water you drink, the foods you eat, the thoughts you think when you decide to go to bed. And every day you're

making your brain worse. And people don't know that. But after having looked at almost 250,000 scans now, it's just really clear that if you get drunk tonight, your brain's going to work worse tomorrow. If you decide to play video games and not get good sleep, your brain is going to be impaired tomorrow.

And I turn 69 in a couple of months, and I've seen thousands of 69, 70 year old brains. And it's not good news, but it's not for everybody. I have this whole group of people that have great looking more senior brains, and I want mine to be one of them. And so, a lot of people go, "I've written 40 books," which just means I'm older and I'm consistent.

Dave:

That's one per year for your entire career. It doesn't just mean you're older, it means that you're prolific.

Daniel:

But people always ask me, "Which one should I start with?" And you should start with this one, because I took what I believe is the wisdom from my 40-year career, and I put it in 366 short essays with a little action step at the end. And it's really the daily habits of brain and mental health. And I say brain and mental health because I hate the word mental. It shames people, it's stigmatizing, it's wrong. They're brain health issues. I think you and I would agree, when someone's brain and body are healthy, their mind is so much better.

Dave:

It's true. But why? This is what kind of drives me nuts. The idea of that the meat operating system in my book, it feels like the body does something before the brain gets the signal. And you're talking about these specific daily practices, which by the way is a great format for a book. Talk about actionable, which is always the challenge. But how do we know if it's a body trauma thing that then got reflected in the brain, versus a brain health thing? How do you even know that?

Daniel:

Well, when I look at scans, one of the things I learned recently is SPECT, the study we do at Amen Clinics, is actually measuring mitochondrial function. 49% of the tracer is actually taken up in the mitochondria. And so, we're really getting a good look, not just of blood flow, but of how healthy your mitochondria are. And you remember when we scanned you, which is what, 15 years ago? Your brain was not healthy, which meant your mitochondria were being poisoned by mold. And so, it was really hard for you to think, even though you are super bright, which is that disconnection between who I think I am and what I'm actually able to do. And I've just come to believe your brain is an organ. So, Justin Bieber told me this, and I love him. And like many of my celebrities, he'd come, he'd not come. He'd do what I say, mostly not.

But when he went through a hard time, he came into my office and he said, I think I get it. My brain is an organ just like my heart is an organ. And if you told me I had heart problems, I'd do everything you said. And I'm going to do what you say." And then he got way better. And I think we have to think like that, is the physical functioning of my body is critical to how my mind works. And if I get my vessels right, if I get my microbiome right, if I get my detoxification pathways right, well, I'm going to think better. And I have to tell you, Dave, there are very few psychiatrists that think like this.

Dave:

It drives me nuts, because until I got the message from you, it was actually I was going to business school. So, it was like 2002 or something when I got my SPECT scan, that was when I recognized I had a hardware problem instead of a moral problem. Like I'm just dumb, or I'm failing, or not trying hard enough, and all that. It's interesting that you're tying it back to mitochondria, and for listeners, the SPECT scan, you inject a radioactive tracer that goes away quickly. Tell me if I'm going too high of a level, and then it gets taken up, right? Or is it radioactive, or is it ... Yeah, it's radioactive but not in a way that's going to harm you. And then it's taken up by mitochondria.

Daniel:

Yeah, it stands for single photon emission computed tomography. It's a nuclear medicine study that uses an isotope, technetium, that I often say has self-esteem problems because it changes shape. And you do get a little bit of radiation, about the same as a head CT. It's gone the next day, and it allows us to see living brain tissue. I mean, it's really cool. And it basically tells us three things, good activity, too little, or too much. And then we can target our treatment to either calm your brain if it's working too hard, which it often does in things like post-traumatic stress disorder or OCD, or COVID. I mean, we could spend a whole hour talking about COVID brain, or if it's too low in activity because the mitochondria have been poisoned.

Either from a toxin, or one thing that most people never think about is general anesthesia. I had a patient who had a hip surgery for six hours, and she just couldn't think afterwards. But when you see her scan afterwards, it just like she got addicted to Xanax. It was low overall on activity. And when you see enough of these, you go, "Oh, I love my brain. I want to love my brain. So, what are the things I should do?"

Dave:

Well, let's talk about anesthesia. I've always been concerned about that. I always liked xenon anesthesia, because it helps mitochondria instead of harming them. But most anesthesiologists either don't know about it or don't do it because it's expensive. But if you're using something like propofol, is there something you can do ahead of time or afterwards to protect yourself? Because sometimes you do need to do it.

Daniel:

So, propofol probably, unless you're doing it a lot, probably that short term anesthetic like [inaudible 00:12:05] is not bad for you. It's more when they're doing general anesthesia and putting you out for a longer time. In fact, children, get this, children who have general anesthesia have a significantly higher incidence of ADHD in learning problems. Adults who have general anesthesia, especially vascular procedures like bypass surgery, have a higher incidence of dementia. And they never tell you about that. They don't put it on the forms, and they'll go, "Oh, it's controversial." Well, then they should put it on the forms if it's controversial.

Dave:

Yeah. Only non-controversial things that increase profit margins belong on forms. I mean, come on.

Daniel:

So, I have a mnemonic. I talk about it in multiple days in the book, bright minds, you want to keep your brain healthy or rescue it you have to prevent or treat the 11 major risk factors that steal your mind.

And anesthesia would fall under T in bright minds for toxins, and there are just so many toxic things in our society.

Dave:

So, in your new book you talk about these categories, and then every day there's something different. So, it's kind of a one page or two page a day sort of thing. And one of the things I wanted to call out, because it would take a long interview and it would be an audiobook if we did all 300 and however many of them there are, you talked about four steps to break a panic attack. And I've heard so many people talking about panic attacks lately. Many people who hadn't had them before. Can you walk through four steps you might want to do to break a panic attack? It's under the practical neuroscience part.

Daniel:

Certainly. With COVID causing inflammation in the brain, I have many before COVID, after COVID scans, like a little bomb goes off of inflammation. A lot of people like all of a sudden out of the blue are having anxiety or a panic attack. The first step is don't leave. So, if you're having a panic attack in the grocery store or you're at a concert, don't leave, because if you leave, that situation is now going to be tied to anxiety and your world is going to begin to get smaller. So, you're anxious, don't leave. Unless of course you're walking in downtown Detroit at 3:00 in the morning, leave. If it's dangerous, leave. If it's not dangerous, you're just feeling this overwhelming sense of impending doom, step two, just take a breath. And do it in a very specific way. Four seconds in, hold it for a second and a half, eight seconds out, hold it for a second and a half. So, it's a 15-second breath. But if you just do four of those, you're going to begin to calm down.

Dave:

So, it's four in and eight out.

Daniel:

Right. Withhold it at the top and at the bottom for a second and a half. And if you do that simple pattern, it'll trigger a relaxation response. It's so good. It's so simple. You don't need a Xanax, and it'll help you so much.

Dave:

That's a major, major tip from the book. Breath work of any sort is so profoundly effective for the brain. Do we know why breath work is doing that to the brain?

Daniel:

Well, if you take twice as long to breathe out as you breathe in, it tends to trigger a parasympathetic response.

Well, if you take twice as long to breathe out as you breathe in, it tends to trigger a parasympathetic response. And that all by itself will calm your body. I found it incredibly helpful. When I first was a young psychiatrist, I did a lot of biofeedback where I would measure physiological processes in your body. And I'd often put a strain gauge around your chest and one around your belly. And I would watch how people breathe. And then I would ask you to think about your mom, your dad, baseball, something stressful. And it happens immediately that your breathing starts to change. So for me, my mom is a

happy concept, and my breathing would become slower, deeper, more with my belly. My dad, on the other hand, was a stressful concept, and I'd start breathing faster and more with my chest.

And if you ever watch a baby breathe or a puppy breathe, they breathe almost exclusively with their belly. So, we call it diaphragmatic breathing. And if you breathe mostly with your belly, quick tip, never wear tight clothes because it'll inhibit your ability to expand your abdomen, which will make you anxious all by itself.

Dave:

So, my corset training, I should stop? I was trying to rearrange my organs with a corset. That's not going to work?

Daniel:

No. And a lot of attractive women wear tight clothes, which is why they're anxious.

Dave:

Well, if they're stretchy tight, that's different than being like hold everything in tight. Like yoga pants are generally going to be okay, right?

Daniel:

They would be okay. So, the first thing is don't leave. The second is breathe slowly, especially on the exhale. The third thing is write down what you're thinking. And it's often thoughts create feelings, feelings create behaviors, and behaviors create the outcome. And we live in a society of undisciplined thinkers.

Dave:

What does that mean?

Daniel:

And I called them ANTs, automatic negative thoughts. The thoughts that come into your mind automatically and ruin your day. There is nowhere in school where they teach you how to manage your mind. And so, people just believe what they think. And panic disorder is almost always, if it's not driven by inflammation from COVID, it's driven by your brain is scaring you. Your brain is predicting the worst possible thing that could happen, which of course would make you anxious. So, the first time I was on CNN, and I've been on, I don't know, 50 times over the years, and the first time I'd written an article on Parade Magazine called How To Get Out Of Your Own Way.

And we got 10,000 letters to our office. So, this is a time when people real mailed things, before email. And so, they asked me to be on CNN to talk about my work. And in the green room, I had a panic attack. I couldn't breathe, I wanted to leave, I started sweating. And thank God the voice in my head, the critic, starts laughing at me. And it's like, "You treat people that have this problem, what do you tell them to do? Don't leave." Because if I would've left, I would not have had the career I've had. So, don't leave. The second thing is breathe. So, I did the 15-second breath, immediately calmed myself down. The third thing is write down what you're thinking. "I'm going to forget my name." Now, you and I have been on TV a lot. No one's actually ever asked us our name.

They already knew it. But that was the thought I had. And the second thought I wrote down was, "You're going to stutter." And the third thought was, "Two million people are going to think you're an idiot."

Well, no wonder I wanted to run out of the studio. So, write it down and then talk back to it. I don't know if you were good at talking back to your parents when you were a teenager?

Dave:

I had oppositional defiant disorder. I was a professional.

Daniel:

Yeah, I was excellent at that. But no one had ever taught me to talk back to me. Come on-

Dave:

What a gift.

Daniel:

... I don't have to believe stupid things.

Dave:

I'm going to teach my kids that. That's brilliant, Daniel.

Daniel:

Well, I have a kid's book that I love. It's actually here, I don't know why it's here. It's called Captain Snout. And [inaudible 00:21:38] our questions, it's about how to kill the ANTs. And so, I wrote down, "You forget your name." And like a cat plays with a mouse before it kills it, if you ever watched a cat, they play with it because they're having fun torturing it, torture the thoughts. I'm like, "You're going to forget your name." I wrote, "Probably not. I've never forgotten my name, but if I do, I have my driver's license in my wallet." "You're going to stutter." I said, "Probably not. I usually don't stutter, but if I do, there are probably dozens of stutterers watching now. They'll have a doctor they can relate to."

Or, "Two million people are going to think you're an idiot." And I wrote, "Probably so." And then right next to it I wrote down these three numbers, 18, 40, 60, which stands for a rule I teach my patients called the 18, 40, 60 rule, which says when you're 18, you worry about what everybody's thinking of you. When you're 40, you don't give a damn what anybody thinks about you. And when you're 60 you realize nobody has been thinking about you at all. And then I went on and I did fine. But if I would've let the anxiety control me, if I would've left, it'd have been very bad for my life. And step four is if you're still anxious after all of that, thiamine, magnesium, GABA, ashwagandha. There's so many natural ways to lower your anxiety.

Never take a benzo. I'm not a fan of benzos. They're addictive. Once you start them, they're hard to stop. And did you know? Get this statistic. 27% of all doctor visits, all doctor visits, someone's prescribing someone a benzo, like Xanax, or Klonopin, or Ativan. It's insanity that people are not managing their mind, they're managing their meds.

Dave:

One of the things that I've noticed causes panic attacks very reliably is histamine intolerance. So, when you either eat histamine directly because you're eating leftovers, or maybe you have more sensitive histamine system because you had mold, because you had even COVID, long COVID, and I wrote about histamine. And the reason I'm into this is, well, I have it, but also I wrote about it in Smarter Not Harder. And if you think about it, what histamine's doing is it's telling the body that something's attacking it. And

it kind of sets off the mast cells, these landmine cells, and we have mast cells in our brains. And since we know that mitochondria all talk to each other via quorum sensing, in fact they talk to each other with inflammatory cytokines, which is what mast cells make, that if I eat some food, like say soy sauce or fish sauce, which are the highest histamine foods, when I eat those I will feel physical anxiety.

But if I take a quarter of a Benadryl, it goes away very, very quickly. And a lot of people haven't just thought about it, but it turns out that Ativan is a decent quality antihistamine in addition to all the other stuff that it does. And I often wondered, if you were having a panic attack and you sucked on a Benadryl, would it go away? Any thoughts on that?

Daniel:

I think for some people if they have mast cell activation syndrome, or their histamine's too high, Benadryl can be very helpful.

Dave:

So, maybe that would be somewhere to go before Ativan?

Daniel:

No, it'd be start tracking. If you are anxious, start tracking what you eat and how it makes you feel. One of the most effective strategies that we use at Amen Clinics is an elimination diet. That if you are struggling with a brain health mental health issue, let's first just get rid of the crap in your diet. And so, eliminate gluten, dairy, corn, soy, artificial dyes and sweeteners. Let's just start there. And multiple high histamine foods-

Dave:

What a difference.

Daniel:

... and some high histamine foods you think of as brain healthy foods, like avocados are a high histamine food. And then just see how you feel. And I'm a huge believer, and talk about this in the book, of journaling. It's like every day just rate your, on a scale of zero to 10, your mood, your anxiety level, your focus, your energy. Just rate them. And then you'll see how those numbers change if you're just paying attention to what you drink, what you eat, and how you sleep.

And I have this one case I talk about in the book of a guy who was severely depressed, had three courses of electroconvulsive therapy, or ECT, 30 different medications. And I'm like, "Let's try an elimination diet because nothing else is working." And within three weeks he is better. And I'm so excited. I'm like, "Let's add back gluten." Nothing happened. "Let's add back dairy." Nothing happened. "Let's add back corn." He said within 20 minutes he had a vision of a gun in his mouth pulling the trigger. "Oh, we should break up with corn."

Dave:

It's like find the guilty suspect, because not all suspects are guilty for you. Right?

Daniel:

Right. And I mean, I'm not a huge fan of gluten anyways.

Dave:

I think it's bad for your brain in general, but not as bad as corn for this guy.

Daniel:

But not as bad as corn for this particular person. And so, what you eat, what you drink really matters.

Dave:

I remember a study when I was first learning this about myself, what I was sensitive to, what I wasn't, going back a long ways where I started journaling because I was so desperate. There was a guy who was treating schizophrenics, and this was back when you were allowed to smoke in the psychiatric ward. And he figured out that if he took his three schizophrenics that he was working with, and put them in a air filtered, away from open windows, no secondhand smoke, they would return to normal. And then you blow some smoke in the room and they think they're Jesus. Complete changes, because that was apparently a trigger for them. So, it turns out that there can be these things in the world around you that aren't even food. And for me, for a long time it was toxic mold. I'd walk into a place and I'd experience a panic attack.

Of course, I knew what it was, but it was a feeling of doom. Strong anxiety, like, "Oh, something's really wrong." And if I sat in that room for another half hour, I'd get massive brain fog, and I'd get systemic inflammation. And once I realized that that was a signal, it wasn't actual doom, it's like, "Oh, that's an environmental signal to look out," and maybe go somewhere else. And then if I didn't listen to the signal then I was going to pay. And over time I just realized I don't have to pay, even if I ignore the signal. I can be in charge of my biology. But that was really advanced meditation and a lot of detoxing that got me there. How would someone new to this going, "Oh wow, maybe it's where I am or what I'm eating that's triggering my anxiety. So, it's not a shortage of Ativan, it's actually an environmental thing." How would you track the environmental stuff versus the food stuff?

Daniel:

Well, I think you just work through it. What we do at Amen Clinics is we look at your brain. We actually start by evaluating the organ. And if I see it has a toxic look, then we have to go hunt that down. So, we have functional medicine doctors that work with us, and I often am like, "Something's toxic in their brain, help me find it." So, whether we'll look at mold, we'll look at heavy metals, we'll look at infections. And I just find that's incredibly helpful. I think all of us, if you're struggling with brain or mental health stuff, do an elimination diet for a month.

And I've just found it to be so helpful. I mean, you and I know this, that we're poisoning our population. And with we're 50% of the population diabetic or pre-diabetic, 72% of people are overweight, our overweight population is not nourished. They're malnourished. Which is why they're mitochondria and their bodies, they feel so awful. And they're like, "Oh, it's because they're eating too much." It's like, "Well, they're not eating enough of the right nutrition."

Dave:

Yeah, it's such a big thing where you feel like you're fat because you're eating too much, but it's because you're getting a lot of foods that didn't have the nutrients you needed to turn on the machinery in your cells. In fact, just mineral deficiencies is a topic of one of the chapters in my new book, because if you have enough zinc, you think your brain's going to work? You don't have enough copper? All these things. And if you're short on those and you reach for a prescription, or even if you're going to try to do breath work, if you're deficient in minerals the breath work's going to be harder to do because your body gets a

signal to calm down. And if it can't make a chemical it needs because it's lacking an input ... So, I just want people to be fully nourished in all the ways you can be nourished, and it works.

And also I wanted to mention, when you say do an elimination diet, the traditional elimination diet, the way it was first written about, and you know this is just to educate our listeners, you could only eat one food from each group every four days. When I first did it, it took me 18 months to do an elimination that was very complex. I would highly recommend go to daveasprey.com/roadmap and get the Bulletproof Diet Roadmap. You don't have to buy my book, just get that for free. And then eat in the green zone. And maybe take out eggs because they're a common trigger other. And then you've just eliminated everything that's likely to be a trigger for you. And if you do that for a week or two, and you feel much better, then aha, something's guilty. And then you add them in one at a time. Just like your patient, oh, he eats corn and he just wants to die.

But he was okay when he added in the other things. But the learning here for you listening, if you eliminate things one at a time and two of them are guilty, you will never see any change whatsoever. And that's the challenge. So, you imagine if you had six tacks in the bottom of your foot, and, "Well, it hurts when I walk." So, you take out one tack, "It wasn't that." You put it back in, you take out the next one. So, you got to eliminate all of them at the same time. And I think that's one reason that longer fasts are so profound for people as well, is that you stopped punching yourself in the face with the guilty foods you were eating. Any thoughts on that?

Daniel:

Well, I don't know if we've ever talked about the study that was replicated from Holland, where they took 300 ADHD children, put them on elimination diet. Within three months, 72% of them did not have ADD. And they do a better job in the United Kingdom, where if they notice there's an offending food they get it out of the food supply. Because there, if you are sick everybody pays for it. But in the U.S., if you are sick you pay for it. And it's just a different mindset on protecting the population. I think we could do so much better. In my new book, there's a whole bunch of days where I imagine if I was an evil ruler and I wanted to create mental illness, what would I do? There's like 62 evil ruler strategies. I mean, it's sort of a play on words. It's how is our society poisoning us? Just one example that I love so much, it's evil ruler genius, where a Girl Scout, this was in San Diego, put up a display of cookies outside a pot dispensary.

And in a span of about three hours, she sold 300 boxes of Girl Scout cookies. And I'm like, "That's genius," but it's evil ruler genius. It's like, let's give them bad sugar and trans fats with the product that gave them the munchies. I'm like, "Wow, this is our society."

Dave:

I have a question. It's coming through from our live studio audience from the Upgrade Collective. And by the way guys, if you want to join in you can go to daveasprey.com and you can join the Upgrade Collective. Then you get to be on and ask questions, and chat with me during these things. The question is for Michelle, and she says, "If you know have toxins like mold or heavy metals, should you get rid of it before you get a brain scan at Amen Clinics? Or would you do the brain scan to see how you're doing?" I actually don't know what the answer to that either.

Daniel:

Well, I would get rid of it as soon as you could. And obviously-

Dave:

Well, the question is do you scan and then get rid of it? Or do you get rid of it and then scan?

Daniel:

If I knew that I had mold in my body I'd move out of wherever there's mold, and then get scanned as soon as you can.

Dave:

Okay. I like that perspective. I think when you start detoxing too, your brain can go down in performance. I got brain fog from getting rid of mercury, because when you release mercury, yeast starts to grow. When you kill yeast, it releases mercury. And so, it's possible that you could, if you're not detoxing properly along the way, or detoxing too fast, you can have worse brain fog and then it comes back at the end. One of the things that was most rewarding for me was I got my scan back in I think 2001, when I was failing out of business school, to be perfectly honest. I was failing out of Wharton. And I was like, "Something's wrong. I'm trying so hard and it's not working." I'm working just with every ounce of effort, and it just didn't matter. And it was a little scary to hear, "Oh, you have a hardware problem, you can fix it."

But what was even cooler was to come back like 15 years later and I visited, and we sat down in your office, and we looked, and all of the holes in my brain that you would see were fixed. And so, to see the shift from the before and the after was really ... It just made me feel like, wow, good work to see how far you've come. So, what I would recommend for Michelle, and for anyone else thinking about it, it's a good idea to know where you are so you can see what your detox did later. Even if you come in a year later, or a couple years later, having a baseline for your brain is good, as well as I hit my head really hard too. And seeing what happens with a SPECT scan, so if you have a healthy scan versus what just happened, I think there's great value just like having your whole body MRI, or having your hormone levels when you're young so you know what they should be when they're old, I really like the idea of having a brain baseline. Which is really cool.

Daniel:

Yeah. I mean, you can't change what you don't measure, which is why I think people should know their important numbers. There's a whole day I talk about know your important numbers, so getting a scan can be helpful. But I think everybody should know their hemoglobin A1C. Everybody should know their vitamin D level. Everybody should know their BMI. Everybody should know their testosterone level, males and females. And I think you've seen probably the same thing I've seen with this epidemic of low testosterone in young men. And I think part of that is the poisoning of America. Joe Pizzorno has this great book I love called the Toxin Solution, that we're just living in toxic soup. But if you know what your brain looks like, if it's great, you celebrate, and if it's not great, you rehabilitate. And I think much of your work, much of the way you have helped the world, which I'm just so proud of you, came out of your own pain.

Dave:

Oh, absolutely.

Daniel:

Tana [Amen] often talks about pained purpose, and the millions of people you've helped is just so cool to me.

Dave:

Thank you, Daniel. And credit where credit is due. Yeah, I've done a lot of personal development and other health work, but it was literally sitting down and looking at the results of my SPECT scan that let me know, oh, I can fix it. Because I was really starting to feel like there was nowhere else to go. I couldn't push any harder. So, you were that little spark at just the right time, or your work was, right when I needed to go, "Oh, there's another path here." And part of that ties in with your new book, with *Change Your Mind*. You talk about the seven lies of happiness. Can you tell me a couple of the lies of happiness? I love that name.

Daniel:

That more, if I have more of something, I'll be happier. More becomes something that you can never satisfy. Don't worry, be happy. That if I was less anxious I would be happier. The research actually says people who have low levels of anxiety die the earliest from accidents and preventable illnesses. So, I think of anxiety on a scale of zero to 10, and our goal is not to get you to zero, our goal is to get you to about three. So, your anxiety helps keep you making good decisions so that you are a bit worried. Alcohol will make you happy. 24 hours later you'll be withdrawing from it and you'll want it again. That it's a trap. I don't know if you know, but the American Cancer Society last year came out against any alcohol, because any alcohol increases the risk of seven different kinds of cancer.

And drinking a disinfectant just doesn't make any sense to me. So, those are a couple I think of from my book *You Happier*, which was just such a fun book for me to write. I love that book, and included parts of it and *Change Your Brain Every Day*.

Dave:

It's funny, because just getting it down to seven lies, I was stuck on the I'll be happy when kind of lie earlier in my 20s. I'll be happy when I have wealth. And then I made six million, and I looked at a friend and said, "Oh, I'll be happy when I have 10." And I lost it all anyway. But that mindset, they're all lies that I'll be happy when. If you had one piece of advice you could give to someone to increase their happiness, just one thing out of all of your knowledge, what makes people happiest the fastest?

Daniel:

It's noticing on what you like more than what you don't like. And I have one daily exercise in the book that I love so much, and I do it every day before I go to bed. I say a prayer and then I go, "What went well today?" And I start at the beginning of my day searching. So, now it's a treasure hunt on what were the coolest things that happened that day. And I focus on them right before I go to sleep, which sets my dreams up to be happier. So, this conversation's going to show up tonight. If you do that consistently, predictably within three weeks your level of happiness goes way up. It's not the thoughts you have that make you suffer. It's the thoughts you attach to that make you suffer. And if you can train your mind ... I love Paul Simon so much, but I love his song *Kodachrome*.

It starts off with, "When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all." And there's nowhere in school where school teaches you to manage your mind. Nowhere. And that's insane. I had to take English 12 times. I took math probably 16 times. And they're important. Brain health and mind health more important.

Dave:

What do you think of the cafeteria food they're feeding kids in schools these days?

Daniel:

Yeah, it's an evil ruler strategy. It's poison. I mean, and not just cafeteria food, it's hospital food, and it's food at church. I did this program with Rick Warren called the Daniel Plan. And the Daniel Plan came out of me going to my church here in Newport Beach and watching the hotdogs, the donuts, the ice cream festival. And I'm like, 'These bastards are trying to kill me. I'm going to get my soul fed, these people are trying to kill me.' That's bad for them and it's bad for me.

Dave:

So, basically it was the devil's hotdog at church.

Daniel:

The devil was alive and well in the food they served.

Dave:

Well, I've been getting requests. My kids are teenagers, and they go to a good school that has okay food, but they use bad oils. Almost all schools will poison kids' brains with cheap and widely available seed oils. And most schools now have some kind of a gluten-free option. But sometimes they're saying, "Oh, well for the picky people let's make a vegan and gluten-free food," which is always highly processed, not edible food that really I wouldn't feed to actually to my pigs as a pig farmer. It would make them meat inedible. And so, you're saying, "Okay, let's not do that." So, especially the athletic teenagers who will reach out to me, and I'm giving them advice, which is you need to bring your own source of protein to school, because you just cannot get a quality protein. They're trying to feed you crickets and soybeans, and telling you that it's healthy when it's full of carbs, and it's deep-fried, processed food balls and things like that.

So, you kind of have to do that. And that's assuming it's within your budget or your parents going to support you on it. And sometimes it's possible. So, sometimes it's a protein powder, or it's a good quality protein bar, and that you either supplement or replace the worst things on the menu and keep the best ones. And it shouldn't be like that. That's what schools are for, is to nourish our children's minds, and that includes what's on their plates. But right now it's just lowering costs.

Daniel:

Well, there's a quote from Byron Katie, I love so much, "Argue with reality, welcome to hell." And the reality is they are not to serve your health. The reality is they're trying to get away with spending the least amount of money possible so they can make their budgets. If you have children and you can send them to school with nourishing food that has adequate amounts of protein and healthy fat, that's the best I think you can do. I adopted my two nieces because their parents couldn't stop using drugs. And we have been eating a very low carbohydrate diet. And she's 18 now, and I love to see how she chooses what she eats, and she finds things she loves that loves her back.

And that's the mindset, that's the right mindset. What foods do I love that love me too? Because you are in a relationship with food, and I don't know if you've ever been in a bad relationship, I certainly have, and I'm not doing that anymore. I'm married to my best friend, and I'm damn sure not doing it with food. We have to just think of our relationship with the planet, but also the foods we eat.

Dave:

And what beautiful words. And it's very hard to take all of your 40 years of experience, and all the 40 books you've written, and try to boil them down so that they can just easily be digested. So, someone who's new to this and saying, "You mean I can control my brain, I can change my brain?" Actually yeah, you can. And it's neat, because as you, I'm going to say attain a certain level of mastery and wisdom, just as an author, as a writer, and as a clinician, a psychiatrist, to be able to structure it so it's just one little thing every day. It's kind of like taking amino acids versus taking a full protein you have to digest. So, it's already kind of pre-digested and it can just go in. And I think you did a really fabulous job in this book, and it's very, very absorbable.

So, thank you as always for your books and your work. It's profoundly affected my life, Daniel, and I'm so honored to be on your board of directors, and to be able to support the Amen Clinics, and all the incredible science that you're doing. And I don't know if you probably get me sent more books than you can actually read, but in Game Changers, my book about what people do to change the world, there's one of the rules is based on an example from you. And in the book I just talk about overcoming critics, and adversity, and things like that. And how when you started out talking about how, "Well, you should look at the brain if you're going to treat it."

And they're like, "How dare you." And to this day, despite overwhelming evidence, you still see the occasional troll who comes out and says something about you. Same thing I get. There's people who still say, "Oh, pseudoscience." Dude, people have lost millions of pounds on my program, and now we're talking about all ... Like okay, whatever. So, there's always going to be haters. And my question for you to end the episode, is what do you do when it's some kind of hater comes after you and ignores all the work you've done, and just kind of meaninglessly attacks you? What's your practice to stay present and happy?

Daniel:

Well, it's always been the stories. It used to really bother me, and I still don't like it. It's still irritating. But ultimately in 1995, so early on, my nine-year-old nephew attacked a little girl on the baseball field. And was drawing pictures of himself shooting other people, and hanging from a tree. I mean, he was just a mess. And I scanned him and we found he had a cyst the size of a golf ball occupying the space of his left temporal lobe. And when the neurosurgeon drained the cyst, his behavior completely went back to normal. So, now the war against my colleagues and not looking at the brain was personal. And I always remember that story and many other stories when people criticize me, it's like, come on. How do you know unless you look? Stop lying about this. And that has kept me strong during some of the dark times.

Dave:

It's funny, when people, especially the calories in, calories out people come after me, or say that it can't work. And I'm like, "Here's a cup of coffee with butter and MCT oil. You drink that and you tell me how you feel." And all of a sudden, "Something's going on here," and all of a sudden they flip. You ever take the reporters or the attention grabbing people who are coming after you saying, "Why don't you come in for a brain scan so we can see why you're so angry?"

Daniel:

Sometimes. I remember, and I don't know if you know my friend Ned Hollowell.

Dave:

Yeah.

Daniel:

So, we're at a meeting together, and he's the sweetest guy but he was such an ass that day. And in front of 50 people he goes, "And why would I ever order a brain scan?" And I went, "So you'd stop guessing and you'd be a better doctor. And if you had any balls, rather than criticize me you'd come to the clinic and get scanned." And so, this was in front of 50 people. And he said, "I'll do that." And then ended up sending people to me. So, sometimes you just have to call out stupidity.

Dave:

Well, I stand ready to help you call out stupid anytime it raises it's ugly, malnourished head, and we can always feed stupid well enough that it becomes smart. And I think we're both working on that in our own way. And thank you so much for your work. Your new book is worthy, at least based on my opinion, guys, it's Change Your Brain. And it's absolutely worth your time.

Daniel:

Awesome. Thanks, my friend.