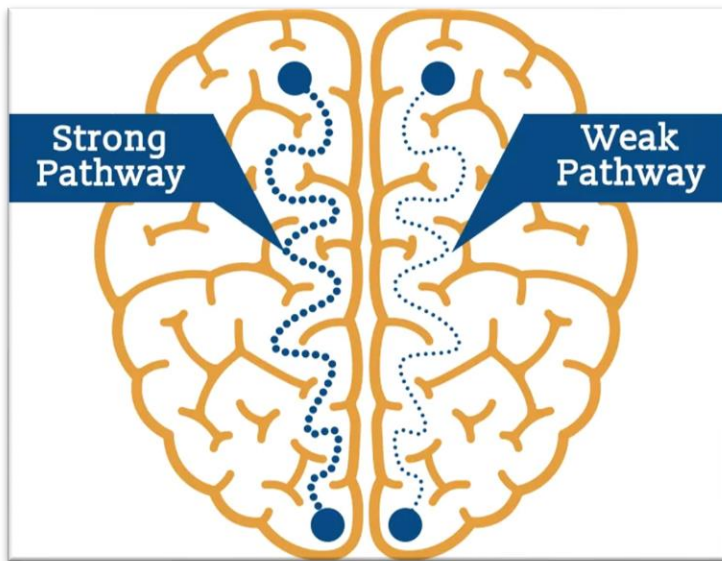


CHANGE YOUR BRAIN—CHANGE YOUR LIFE

A Healthier You Series

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Our brains learn by building pathways from a stimulus to a response. To better understand the process, think of how highways are built. Many started out as cow paths that were followed enough times that a discernible trail was created. As people with horses and wagons started to take the trail it widened and became easier to follow. After a while it became a paved one-lane road that grew to a two-lane road. The most frequently used roads were widened, graded and became Superhighways.

The same principles are at work in our brains when we acquire new knowledge and behaviors. The first time we learn or try something new, our thinking brains are hard at work guiding us through the process. As we repeat the new thing, we need to think about it less and less as our mental cow path becomes a paved two-lane road. If we continue to do the new thing, our brain builds a superhighway by widening the neuron pathways and paving them with myelin in order to reduce the time between stimulus and response.

When we quit using pathways, they are still there but become weaker. As we change our lifestyle we begin the dual process of building new pathways to a healthier destination and weakening old, destructive pathways—rewiring our brain.

How to Rewire Your Brain

Set a New Destination

1. Write it down, make it clear and realistic

Recognize what triggers you back to the old, destructive path

1. Write them down together with what you can do to avoid them
2. Create a plan for what you will do if you get triggered

Look for alternate behaviors and rewards that support your plan

1. Instead of food, connect to people, music, reading, walking, service, etc.
2. Remember the reasons you want to be healthy
3. Do the emergency plan from step 2 when needed

Make a decision based on your highest goals

1. Recognize yourself for successful choices
2. If you're not successful, evaluate what you learned and what you will do differently next time
3. Never give up