

Beautiful

Brain

A 7-STEP GUIDE
TO A BETTER,
SMARTER,
YOUNGER YOU

Beautiful

Look Radiant from the Inside Out
by Empowering Your Mind

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with Jodie Gould

You

Beautiful Brain, Beautiful You

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To the men in my life,
my husband, Roger,
and my sons, Eric and Stephen,
with gratitude and love.

And to all women everywhere,
may you nurture and celebrate the
true beauty of your brain.

—MP

To my beloved family (brainiacs all),
and to all the brilliant and radiant women.
May your mind, body, and spirit
stay forever young.

—JG

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INTRODUCTION

The Beauty/Brain Connection

Beauty is how you feel inside, and it reflects in your eyes.

It is not something physical.

—SOPHIA LOREN, ACTRESS

In the search for that magic lotion or potion that will make us more beautiful, I'm here to tell you that the answer lies inside your head. That's right—your brain is the key to improving every facet of your life. It generates your thoughts, emotions, actions, reactions, moods, dreams, and creative ideas. It holds all the memories, experiences, and knowledge that you have accumulated since you were born. It interprets every sensation you experience and controls each movement you make. It allows you to learn and to remember, and it ultimately determines whether you will live a productive and meaningful life. Your brain is your essence, and it is also the essence of your beauty. By enhancing your mind you can feel more energetic, creative, and alive—all of which makes you more beautiful!

In my training at Harvard Medical School and neurology practice at Massachusetts General Hospital, I have been fortunate to witness and contemplate the beauty of the human brain. I wrote this book so I could share the empowering knowledge of what you can do to get your brain in peak condition and keep it that way for life. Other brain books will advise you to challenge your brain with puzzles and memory games. While these might be helpful, I encourage you to embark on a wider journey that includes optimizing the lifestyle and health factors that impact your brain function, as well as pursuing adventure and enriching yourself by trying new activities that will challenge and expand your mind.

Beautiful Brain, Beautiful You is a guide to achieving your personal best brain. By following my seven-step program, you will learn how to reap the benefits of a healthy, active, vibrant mind at any age. With your brain at its best, your ability to think creatively, make wise decisions, and problem solve will improve. Your mind will be focused, your mood high, and your self-confidence boosted. What could be more attractive?

So how can we tap into the beauty/brain connection? It starts with understanding how your face mirrors the chemical activity going on in your brain. This activity produces microfacial expressions—the tiny involuntary reflections of your thoughts that radiate from within and give you that inner glow, which we will talk more about later. By transforming the workings of your inner mind and altering the way you think, you can change the way you present yourself to the world.

Consider how you look after you've stayed up too late or had a few too many glasses of wine. Chances are you are not at your best. When your thoughts are sluggish and your mood is low, the twinkle in your eye that you have when you are at the top of your game disappears. This is what I call a "Bad Brain Day." We all have them. Whether we call it Mommy Brain, PMS, or Senior Moments, these are the times when we are running on empty and our brain finds it harder to muster the energy to get through the day. Fortunately there are concrete steps you can take to improve your

brain performance, uplift your mood, and trigger creative thinking.

The beauty of the brain is that the more you use it, the stronger and more resilient it will become. Unlike a road that becomes riddled with potholes the more it's used, neural pathways actually get reinforced and become more flexible with use. The scientific term for this is neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to remodel itself by making new connections as well as new neurons. We once believed that we were born with all the brain cells we would ever have in our lifetime. We now know that our brain is a fertile field that is capable of producing new cells and creating new connections throughout our lives. What makes this such an exciting new discovery is that we now know it's possible to keep our brain vibrant and supple as we get older.

When we put on makeup, we are creating a superficial kind of beauty that is erased as soon as it is washed off. But when you give your brain that much-needed makeover, the changes that occur are profound and everlasting. Your brain is constantly evolving below the surface so that your inner beauty can shine through. By providing a luxuriant, nurturing environment, your mind will thrive and remain youthful.

A beauty/brain makeover involves “indulging in the new,” because the more you learn, the easier it is to learn more. In this book, you will discover what happens to your brain when you are exposed to something new, and why your brain is the gift that keeps on giving. I will explain how physical ailments, mood disorders, hormones, and medications directly affect brain performance. I will also tell you which supplements work and which do not, and how the beauty we see on the outside is a direct reflection of what's happening on the inside.

Ever wonder why it's so hard to lose those extra ten pounds? It has to do with your brain! I will show you how changing the way you think can help you change your brain and your body. I will ask you to take better care of your health by getting your heart pumping, which improves blood flow to your brain and encourages the growth of new neurons and new brain pathways. I will explain why having the proper mind-set will help you to lose that unhealthy weight you might be carrying around. By controlling your mind, you can change your negative behavior, thoughts, and actions. The same goes for adopting the the Smart Diet, which will help boost your brain function while trimming your waistline.

You will also discover how to “make over your mind” by engaging in relaxation techniques that relieve stress, improve mood, and enhance mental clarity. Similarly, you will have a new understanding of how to beautify your brain rhythms through restorative sleep and how to synchronize your brain's internal clocks, which influence your concentration, energy, hunger, libido, and emotions.

While reading this, I hope you will be inspired to make the most of your brain—our most precious gift. Once you notice the change in the way you feel and the way you look (and others start noticing as well!), I hope that you will help spread the word to other women about how gorgeous their minds can be, and how the lifestyle choices they make can transform their brain and appearance from dull to dazzling. As much fun as a brain makeover can be, there is no quick fix for a Bad Brain Day. Some of the lifestyle changes in my program will require more time and effort on your part. Still, as you progress in the program, you will start replacing Bad Brain Days with Beautiful Brain Days by tapping into your brain's ability to change and renew itself. By the end of the book, you will discover the richness of your mind's unlimited potential and realize that you can

achieve your personal best only when your brain is at its personal best. When this happens, you will see why the most powerful kind of beauty is the one that emanates from within.

Picture Perfect (A Beauty/Brain Exercise)

Look at several photographs of yourself at different stages in your life. Now select the ones where you appear the most radiant—ones in which you have that special gleam in your eye. What's happening in the photo? What were you thinking when the shutter clicked? Are you crossing the finish line in a race? Maybe you just had a baby. We might not always look our best after running a marathon or after hours of labor, but even if your hair or makeup isn't perfect, what you're seeing in these photos is that inner glow that radiates from your thoughts and lights up your face through your eyes.

This is the kind of beauty we want to have. It occurs when your brain is at its best and is focused on the joy and meaning of the moment. And it isn't always a spectacular event that creates this picture-perfect feeling. When you are engaged in anything that you are interested in or passionate about, your inner glow will shine from within.

STEP ONE
Indulge in the New

It's never too late to become what you might have been.

—GEORGE ELIOT, NOVELIST

Every experience we have changes our brain. Even as you read this sentence, your brain is physically changing and making new connections. And what we now understand is that the richer and more stimulating your experiences are, the more profound these changes can be. Unfortunately many of us continue to just go through the paces of everyday life: work, kids, chores, bills, meals, rinse and repeat. Our brain slips into autopilot, and instead of forging new connections we use the same neural pathways again and again, like running in circles around a track. But our brain craves novelty, so when we are stuck in a rut we are boring our brains. And while you won't literally go brain-dead from boredom, you are depriving your brain of stimulating mental activity, which is essential for staying young and vibrant, in mind and in body.

The first step of your personal beauty/brain makeover is surprisingly simple and doesn't require medication, invasive surgery, or an enormous investment of time: I want you to open yourself up to five new experiences. Many studies suggest that the more we are engaged in stimulating activities, the less likely we are to develop dementia. Indulging in new experiences is like sipping from the fountain of youth.

The stories below are based on women whom I have met in my personal life or in my practice. They have all fallen into a rut and need to Indulge in the New in order to experience more Beautiful Brain Days.

♦ As new parents, Ashley and her husband, both in their thirties, waited six months after their daughter was born before going out to a romantic restaurant. During dinner, however, the only thing Ashley talked about was “the baby.” Her husband tried to change the subject several times, but somehow it always segued back to their daughter. Ashley used to have a wide range of interests, and her husband missed the engaging discussions they used to have, which made them feel more intimate. Ashley admitted that she has been so focused on motherhood that she felt she had nothing else to share, and that lately she hadn't read anything but parenting magazines.

♦ Pamela, a single workaholic in her forties, follows a daily routine that is as precise as a Swiss watch. She has lunch at her desk every day, and on weekends she orders takeout from the same restaurant, which she eats while she watches a rented movie. Although she earns a good salary working as an accountant, her job no longer offers the mental challenges that made it fun when she first started her job. She missed her college days, when she felt excited by her future and the endless possibilities that lay ahead. Pamela

can't remember the last time she went out on a date.

♦ Marisol is an empty nester who has lived vicariously through her children for the past twenty-four years. Her friends tell her she's a great listener because she never talks about her personal life, mostly because she doesn't have one. She feels a void inside and has nothing to look forward to except the weekend phone calls from her kids. She and her husband rarely make love anymore, and she doesn't know what she can do to enjoy what should be a second honeymoon.

♦ After Katherine, a seventy-six-year-old widow, suffered from a stroke, she needed to walk with a cane. She used to be involved in many activities and organizations, but she is now embarrassed by her condition and rarely goes out with friends. They used to call to check in on her and ask her to join them for upcoming meetings and events, but she's made so many excuses about why she can't go that the phone has stopped ringing. Although her doctor reassured her that her memory was not affected by the stroke, she's been feeling mentally dull and forgetful lately.

Whatever your age or stage of life, your brain needs and pines for new experiences and stimulation to feel alive, active, and beautiful! Awakening your mind by indulging in the new will not only make you sharper, but it will also give you that boost of self-confidence you need to feel better about yourself and your life. You will experience an enhanced self-esteem that will extend to every facet of your life—including your sex life. It is a fact that boosting your self-esteem is a natural aphrodisiac! As you stimulate your mind, you'll stand a little taller, smile more often, and experience more joy in the world around you.

Transforming Bad Brain Days into beautiful ones begins by making simple changes in your routine, which can be anything from going to a museum during your lunch hour, to trying out a new recipe or listening to a new radio station. I know it sounds too simple, but even the smallest changes will begin to transform the way you think and the way you look and feel. Later I will help you to choose a Passionate Pursuit, a new endeavor that requires more effort, such as gardening, learning how to play an instrument, or mastering new computer skills. Keep in mind (pun intended) that the more you immerse yourself in a new activity and the more passionate you are about what you are doing, the greater the rewards.

CHANGE YOUR MIND

A wise man changes his mind, a fool never.

—Spanish proverb

Before we begin, I want you to understand what happens to your brain when it is exposed to new information. When we experience something new, the prefrontal cortex—the area of your brain that is constantly monitoring your environment—literally perks up. Think of this area of your brain as your personal CEO. It directs attention, makes decisions, reasons, and solves problems.

Working together with the hippocampus (your memory center; see sidebar on page 11), these areas fire up when the brain is presented with new stimuli and mental challenges. Because these parts of the brain age the fastest and are the most vulnerable to the ravages of Alzheimer's disease, we must keep them fit and strong throughout our lifetime. You can do this by challenging your mind with new activities and new opportunities to learn.

As with any new skill, the more you practice, the stronger your brain will become. For example, in a study conducted at the International University in Bremen, Germany, researchers taught healthy children and adults between ages six and eighty-nine how to juggle. The results showed that after just seven days of training, there was a measurable increase in gray matter in the area of the brain that processes visual tracking. Although the change was temporary, it clearly showed how our experiences can shape our brain.

In another German study, researchers did magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans on medical students before, during, and three months after their intensive studying for board exams. The MRIs showed a significant increase in the volume of the parietal lobes and the hippocampus. Even more remarkable is that three months after they stopped studying for exams, the med students' hippocampus continued to expand. Scientists now believe that this continued growth of the hippocampus is likely due to neurogenesis, the birth of new neurons that are stimulated by learning.

These studies show that we truly have the capacity to design and shape our brain. Our experiences, the choices we make daily, and the ways we use our brain ultimately determine its structure. Indulging in the new and challenging your mind optimize your brain's ability to reinvent itself.

I Remember It Well

When I was in high school my father gave me one of the most valuable books I ever read. It was called *The Memory Book* by Harry Lorayne and Jerry Lucas. It explains how to remember anything by tapping into the power of association and visualization. Throughout college, medical school, and even now, I use this memory system. To remember that the hippocampus is the memory center, for example, you need to form a mental picture that will stick. The word *hippocampus* makes me think of a "hippo" on a college "campus." Picture a huge hippo lying on its belly in the middle of the college quad. He is the center of attention, as the students must walk around him to get to class. Between his front feet he holds a list of facts that he is trying to commit to memory. He repeatedly taps the list against his forehead to force the information into his brain. If you visualize this scene, you too will never forget the hippocampus.

When I had to learn large volumes of information during medical school and residency, I would actually draw these scenes out in notebooks. I'll never forget the day I was reviewing my memory drawings as I often did while exercising on the StairMaster at the gym. A curious man on the machine next to me asked, "Do you write comic strips? I always see you studying cartoons."

REJUVENATE YOUR MIND

The adage “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is patently false. A recent study by Dr. Karlene Ball revealed that subjects ranging in age from sixty-five to ninety-four performed better on cognitive tests when they were instructed on how to improve memory, reasoning, or speed. Even more impressive was the fact that two years afterward, the participants who had been trained still outperformed the control group, which did not receive instruction. The good news here is that even if you have neglected your brain for years it doesn’t hold a grudge. It’s never too late to learn something new, and there is no limit to what you can learn. Learning is like exercise—the more you do it, the stronger and smarter you get.

Thanks for the Memories—the Hippocampus at Work

The brain’s memory center, the hippocampus, is like a library. The hippocampus, like the librarian at the circulation desk, files and sorts information that comes in daily. If the librarian isn’t at her desk, the new journals and newspapers don’t get stored on the shelves or placed in the proper stacks. The library soon becomes outdated.

The files that were either shelved correctly or have been up in the stacks for years may still be available. However, the brain cannot stockpile new memories if the hippocampus is faulty. **[End of Sample]**