

How to Take in the Good

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The Problem

Over millions of years of evolution, it was more important for our ancestors to react to threats than to opportunities. Here's why: if you live in the wild under dangerous conditions and miss out on a "carrot," you could go get another one later – but if you fail to avoid a "stick," then WHAP, no more carrots forever. That's why scientists say the brain has a "negativity bias." In effect, it's like Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones. The unfair and unfortunate result is that negative experiences get captured in emotional memory instead of positive ones, gradually darkening your outlook, mood, and sense of self.

One Good Solution

To overcome the negativity bias, and instead, make your brain like Velcro for the good stuff of daily life, take in the good in three simple steps:

1. Let positive facts become positive experiences. (Let yourself feel good if you get something done, if someone is nice to you, or if you notice a good quality in yourself.)
2. Savor the positive experience for 10-20-30 seconds. Try to let it fill your body, and be as intense as possible.
3. Intend and sense that the positive experience is soaking into you, like water into a sponge, becoming a part of you.

Self-Directed Neuroplasticity

Try to "take in the good" (TIG) several times a day. Any single time won't make much difference. But over time, you will be weaving new resources into the fabric of your brain and your self. That's because *neurons that fire together, wire together*. How you use your mind sculpts your brain. It's like building a muscle: if you get a bunch of neurons firing together for positive experiences, that will build new neural structures. The more you take in the good, the more your brain will change for the better.

Filling the Hole in Your Heart

There is an optional, 4th step that is a great way to take in important experiences that may have been lacking when you were young, or even to heal old painful experiences. When you are having a good experience today – let's say you are feeling cared about or appreciated – imagine that it is sinking down into old places of lack or pain (like being neglected or rejected), and gradually soothing them, and giving them what they need. The key is to keep the current positive experience intense and in the foreground of awareness, with the old material dim and in the background; if you get sucked into the old material, drop it and just focus on the positive experience.

Resources

There is much more on this method in my new book, *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*.