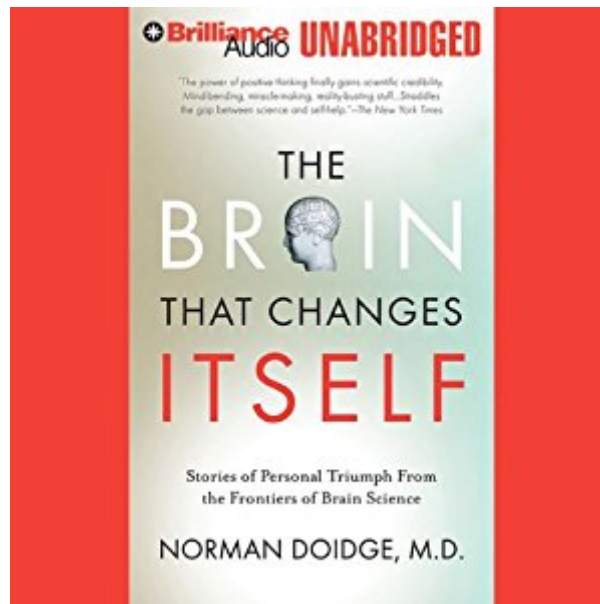


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# The Brain That Changes Itself: Personal Triumphs From The Frontiers Of Brain Science



## Synopsis

An astonishing new science called neuroplasticity is overthrowing the centuries-old notion that the human brain is immutable. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Norman Doidge, M.D., traveled the country to meet both the brilliant scientists championing neuroplasticity and the people whose lives they've transformed; people whose mental limitations or brain damage were seen as unalterable. We see a woman born with half a brain that rewired itself to work as a whole, blind people who learn to see, learning disorders cured, IQs raised, aging brains rejuvenated, stroke patients learning to speak, children with cerebral palsy learning to move with more grace, depression and anxiety disorders successfully treated, and lifelong character traits changed. Using these marvelous stories to probe mysteries of the body, emotion, love, sex, culture, and education, Dr. Doidge has written an immensely moving, inspiring book that will permanently alter the way we look at our brains, human nature, and human potential. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Neuroplasticity has recently become a bit of a buzzword. Long the preserve of neuroscientists, this is one of a number of new books on the topic written for the public. I recently reviewed Sharon Begley's superb book - Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain - and this one is in a similar vein. Though it is rather different from Sharon's book in which the main focus was on the changes wrought in the brains of meditators, while this one looks at the extraordinary responses of the brain to injury or congenital absence of sensory organs. Since this book went to press, yet another study,

this time from India, has shown that some blind children may be able to regain their sight, an observation that is helping turn a lot of neurology on its head. Neuroplasticity is a topic of enormous practical importance. The increasing evidence that the brain is a highly adaptable structure that undergoes constant change throughout life is a far cry from the idea that we are simply the product of our genes or our environment. Our genes help determine how we can respond to the environment; they do not make us who we are. And we all have untapped potential. This is more than the old nature/nurture debate in a new bottle. It has implications for human potential: how much can you develop your own brain and mind? Can you really teach a child to be a kind, loving person who can dramatically exceed his or her potential? Can psychotherapy really help change your brain for the better? Can we help re-wire the brain of a psychopath? Do we have the right to try? The author is both a research psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst who has interviewed many experts in the field. His book is full of well chosen and detailed stories about scientists and their discoveries as well as case reports of triumph over unbelievable adversity. There is also a good discussion of people who have remarkable abilities despite the absence of key regions of the brain. This book is a good complement to Sharon Begley's and if you can afford it, then I strongly recommend that you get both books. If your interest is more in personal development and its effects on the brain, then Sharon's book will be the one for you. If you are more interested in the science and anecdotes about scientists and some amazing patients, then this book may be the one to go for. Highly recommended. Richard G. Petty, MD, author of *Healing, Meaning and Purpose: The Magical Power of the Emerging Laws of Life*

This is one of the most interesting nonfiction books that I have *ever* read. I found the book fascinating, but lest that be chalked up to my being a psychologist, my husband the computer scientist found it fascinating, too. Scientists used to believe that the brain was relatively fixed and unchanging -- some of them still believe that -- but recent research shows that the brain is much more mutable than biologists, psychologists, physicians (and any other scientists who studied brains) had ever thought. For example, anecdotal evidence had long supported the idea that blind people hear better than sighted people, but scientists pooh-poohed this idea, saying that there was no mechanism for that to occur. Well, they recently discovered that the area of the brain usually called the visual cortex is taken over for auditory processing in blind people. So blind folks have twice as much brain space devoted to processing sounds, which means that they really do hear better, and now we know why. Scientists were astounded to discover that the "visual" cortex was really just brain space that could be used for anything. Psych 101 and Bio 101 textbooks often have

a picture in them that shows which areas of the brain control which bodily functions, and this is all presented as fixed and unchanging. Imagine our surprise to learn that the brain can make fairly large shifts in just a few days -- for example, if you blindfold somebody for five days, the area of their brains that's usually called the visual cortex starts using large sections of itself to process touch and sound, and this change is made in as little as two days. Two days!

The book is not just theoretical, though -- the author is interested in the theory, but he's even more interested in how all of this can be applied to better the lives of real people. He talks about people with strokes who've learned to walk again, people with vestibular problems who've learned to substitute something else for their missing vestibular system, people who've been helped with ADHD, autism, retardation, and many other "incurable" conditions by altering their brains. The downside of the book is that the author is a Freudian, so there are some annoying comments about how Freud knew it all along, but if you can overlook that, it's all fascinating. The author does an excellent job of drawing the reader in with a story about a real person, then elaborating on the ideas by talking about studies that show the basic principles and their implications, then explaining how this can be used to ameliorate or even cure conditions that were considered incurable. This book blew me away!

The chapter titles will give you more information about the subject matter:

1. A Woman Perpetually Falling...: Rescued by the Man Who Discovered the Plasticity of Our Senses
2. Building Herself a Better Brain: A Woman Labeled "Retarded" Discovers How to Heal Herself
3. Redesigning the Brain: A Scientist Changes Brains to Sharpen Perception and Memory, Increase Speed of Thought, and Heal Learning Problems
4. Acquiring Tastes and Loves: What Neuroplasticity Teaches Us About Sexual Attraction and Love
5. Midnight Resurrections: Stroke Victims Learn to Move and Speak Again
6. Brain Lock Unlocked: Using Plasticity to Stop Worries, Obsessions, Compulsions, and Bad Habits
7. Pain: The Dark Side of Plasticity
8. Imagination: How Thinking Makes It So
9. Turning Our Ghosts into Ancestors: Psychotherapy as a Neuroplastic Therapy
10. Rejuvenation: The Discovery of the Neuronal Stem Cell and Lessons for Preserving Our Brains
11. More than the Sum of Her Parts: A Woman Shows Us How Radically Plastic the Brain Can Be

Appendix 1: The Culturally Modified Brain  
Appendix 2: Plasticity and the Idea of Progress

Highly recommended!

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