

Unlearning SuperMom

Are You Ready to Make Change?

A short, science-based check-in

One of the most exciting discoveries in the field of neuroscience is the fact that our brains have the ability to change. Our brains are made up millions of neural pathways, which are like ski slopes dictating our thoughts, behaviors and automatic reactions.

The brilliance of neuroplasticity is that we can change those pathways and create new thoughts and behaviors.

“Neuroplasticity is a 6-syllable word for hope”

- Ann Betz

There are five important factors to helping your brain be as plastic as it can (and be able to make the changes you’re trying to make). This worksheet is a check-in on those five factors, to see if there’s anything you need to modify before you start.

Instructions:

- Read through the 5 Factors and answer the questions as best you can
- Once you’ve gone through them all, check-in:
 - Which of the 5 Factors are you doing well at?
 - Which one needs some love and attention?

Disclaimer: Please tread carefully here. I guarantee there are some areas where you’re not doing as well as you’d like, and I also guarantee there is at least one area where you are doing much better than you think. Be kind to yourself and make any changes from a place of love.

The 5 Factors are based on this [blog post](#) by Ann Betz at BeAbove Leadership, and have been printed here with her permission.

The Five Factors to Make Change

1. Exercise

The Science:

Aerobic exercise improves blood flow and increases oxygen levels, which increase neuron growth. Exercise also increases the volume of white and grey matter in the brain. A minimum of 30 minutes, three times a week is recommended (although shorter workouts of more intensity and longer with less are helpful as well).

Questions:

How often do you exercise?

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On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about your current physical activity?

2. Sleep

The Science:

A healthy adult needs between 7-9 hours of sleep. During sleep, our brain has the chance to integrate learning and also combs through information and decides what is needed and what is not.

Questions:

How much sleep are you getting a night?

How long does it take you to fall asleep?

What is your bedtime routine?

How do you feel when you first wake up in the morning?

3. Food

The Science:

The brain needs Omega-3s and vitamins from foods to create new neural pathways. It's also critically important to stay away from foods and substances that inhibit neural growth and/or create inflammation. According to new research, aspartame and other artificial sweeteners, high fructose corn syrup, alcohol, vegetable oils and many grains may all contribute to non-optimal brain states. Promising research finds coconut oil, berries, B vitamins, salmon, spinach (and much more) help to build neural connections in the brain.

Questions:

How many brain-friendly foods are you getting a week?

How many unfriendly foods are in your current diet?

On a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about the food you're eating?

4. Novelty

The Science:

New experiences stimulate neuronal connections. If we don't know how to do something, the cognitive patterns for it don't exist in our brains, thus new connections must be made. In order to maintain the benefits, however, these experiences have to increase in challenge in order to create new growth. Additionally, we simply don't pay attention to things that are boring.

Questions:

When was the last time you learned something new?

What are you currently doing in your life that is fun or novel?

What's something new that you've been wanting to start, but haven't yet? What's been holding you back?

5. Attention & Focus

The Science:

The close paying of attention (as in study, meditation and focused attention) increases neurotransmitters responsible for creating new neural connections. In addition, many studies have linked meditation practice to differences in cortical thickness or density of gray matter.

Questions:

How much time do you currently dedicate to attention & focus (eg. Meditation, focused study, etc)?

How much of your day do you spend multi-tasking?

When is the last time you got quiet and focused on just one thing?

Some Thoughts on Making Change

After going through that worksheet, I'm sure you've noticed a few areas that could use a little love. Perhaps it's the Diet Coke you start your day with, or the fact that you are a very normal mom, juggling 15 things in your brain at any one moment.

So, how do we make change? Here's the formula:

- **Awareness** – you become aware of a habit that is no longer serving you, and you decide that you'd like to change it. For this exercise, choose one area that you want to make change in.
- **Move What's In the Way** – lots of people skip this step, but it's critical to look at the habit and why it exists. There is a reason for every behavior, thought and recurring emotion. Spending some time to acknowledge and honor that will allow you to move through. What's kept you from meditating? What's your aversion to exercise? What's been taking a priority over your sleep? Be compassionate, kind, and just take a look.
- **Take Action** – decide what you want instead, make a game plan, create a structure, get support, and take new action.
- **Fall Off and Do It Again!** – You will blow it and fall off. You will miss a gym day and decide to go to bed early instead. You will eat chocolate cake for lunch. You will stay up late to finish that project. This is where the real work comes in – being the person who gets up and starts again.

The key to remember here is that you're always farther ahead than you were before. You never fall back all the way to where you began. You always come out with new information, new ideas, and new learnings about yourself, and that my friend, is progress.