

BREAK UP WITH YOUR PAST



H HUNDRED
LIFE DESIGN



“IF YOU WANT SOMETHING YOU DON’T YET HAVE, YOU MUST DO SOMETHING YOU HAVE NOT YET DONE.” THIS ISN’T JUST A SAYING— IT’S A CLEAR, SCIENTIFIC FACT.

Of course, all of us want things we don’t yet have...but “doing something we’ve not yet done” is the difficult part. It’s much easier, by contrast, to stick with things we’re comfortable with, or familiar faces and experiences from the past.

But while new experiences can cause stress and anxiety, they also have significant benefits in life, even beyond getting you that elusive “something you don’t yet have.” New experiences can stimulate increased brain development, create positive attitude changes, extend your comfort zone, reduce mental deterioration as we age, and more!

Truly breaking up with your past means letting go of the same old routines that have held you captive. Instead, you’ll need to try something new as a way to trigger mental stimulation and positive changes, regardless of where you are in life. Check out some of the ways research has shown that stepping out of your comfort zone is way more than just a saying.

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Comfort zones are hard to step out of—not just because they’re comfy, but because the desire to stick to our comfort zone seems hard-wired in our biology as we age.

According to a theory of aging known as Continuity Theory, adults who are middle-aged and older often end up maintaining the same general lifestyle and belief system they had when they were younger—including old relationships, behaviors, ideas, and activities. Essentially, as we age, our internal mental structure is

designed to stay consistent throughout our lives.

Unfortunately, this means we need to try that much harder to break free of our existing mental structure, and to step outside of this comfort zone. Instead of adapting past strategies to new experiences, or settling into our established, convenient routines, it becomes more and more important for us to try new things as we grow older.

Atchley, R. C. (1989). A Continuity Theory of Normal Aging. The Gerontologist, 29(2), 183-190.



REDUCE MENTAL AGING

While the study of mental aging lacks research in some areas, existing studies show time and time again that using your brain in novel ways can not only stimulate structural brain changes, but also significantly reduce your risk of mental aging as you get older.

According to a study in *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine*, older adults who keep their brain sharp through regular games and puzzles, hobbies, arts and crafts, and physical exercise find a decreased risk for some of the most common mental issues as we age, such as memory loss, decreased mental processing, and even the risk of Alzheimer's disease. More randomized and controlled trials are needed, as well as long-term follow up, but researchers are cautiously optimistic that regular efforts to try new things can optimize cognitive well-being in aging adults.

La Rue, A. (2010). Healthy Brain Aging: Role of Cognitive Reserve, Cognitive Stimulation, and Cognitive Exercises. Clinics in Geriatric Medicine, 26(1), 99-111.

CHANGE YOUR MIND, LITERALLY

Here's the good news...it's actually easy to change your mind, in a certain sense. One experiment in Cerebral Cortex found that changes in human brain plasticity on a structural level is evident in as little as five days. In the study, researchers found that regular, novel stimulation caused noticeable alterations in the grey matter of participants' brains even in a short period of time.

This isn't hard so to believe: your brain is an organ, strictly speaking, but it behaves like a muscle in many ways. It can be trained to adapt and respond to different types of stimulation more quickly, and certain skills and functions can be improved through regular usage. In other words, repeated exposure to new experiences can literally change the structure of our minds.

May, A., Hajak, G., Gänßbauer, S., Steffens, T., Langguth, B., Kleinjung, T., & Eichhammer, P. (2007). Structural Brain Alterations following 5 Days of Intervention: Dynamic Aspects of Neuroplasticity. Cerebral Cortex, 17(1), 205-210.



KEEP YOUR COMFORT ZONE EXTENDED

Lastly, remember this: something new is only new for so long. Your brain acts just like any muscle in your body, and once it adjusts to a new or different experience, your mind will simply start to accept it as “normal.” Because of this, you may find yourself facing the law of diminishing returns if you try the “new” experience over and over again.

In Alasdair White’s book *From Comfort Zone to Performance Management*, the author discusses how our comfort zone is affected by new experi-

ences, anxiety, and stress. Ultimately, your brain becomes “lazy” again if you don’t keep giving it new experiences—meaning that we should always be reaching for something just outside of our expanding comfort zone. We as humans need to put ourselves through a little stress and anxiety every now and then, in order to break up with our past and reach for something new.

White, A. (2009). From Comfort Zones to Performance Management: Understanding Development & Performance. Belgium: White & MacLean Publishing.

NO ONE’S EVER SAID THAT STEPPING OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE IS EASY. BREAKING UP WITH YOUR PAST MEANS DITCHING YOUR FAMILIAR OLD ROUTINES, HABITS, AND IDEAS—BUT THE END RESULT IS CERTAINLY WORTH THE TROUBLE. TO START MAKING YOUR MENTAL CHANGE TODAY, CONNECT WITH US TO FIND THE SUPPORT YOU NEED ON YOUR JOURNEY.

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