

EPISODE 170

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Live Happy Now. The podcast to inspire you to live a happier life and give you the tools to make it happen. This episode is brought to you by Momentous Institute. Powered by the Salesmanship Club of Dallas and dedicated to building and repairing social, emotional health for kids since 1920.

This is Live Happy Science editor Paula Felps and today on episode 170 of Live Happy Now, we're talking about working out but it's not the kind of workout you might normally think about. Joe Bates is the author of *Making your Brain Hum, 12 Weeks To A Smarter You*.

It seems fitting as we go back to school that we're talking about making our brains work smarter, not harder. Joe looks at how things like exercise and nutrition and sleep are necessary for sharper brains. If you want to start building a better brain, let's hear what Joe has to say about it.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:49.6] PF: Joe, welcome to Live Happy now. I'm really excited to have you on the show today.

[0:00:53.7] JB: Thank you so much for having me Paula.

[0:00:56.2] PF: Can you first of all tell us what it is that you mean by brain cardio?

[0:01:00.2] JB: Brain cardio started out as a series of mental exercises to try to give the brain a jumpstart to recover some of the learning that it's had in the past and they have forgotten over the years with some disuse. It actually was an outcome of writing a book called *Making Your Brain Hum* and that is an example of brain cardio.

[0:01:25.8] PF: What does brain cardio consist of?

[0:01:27.6] JB: Well, it consists of a series of mental exercises and I wrote the book 12 chapters, addressing 12 different categories of learning. But the term actually has become much broader than that and it's really become more of a lifestyle. The brain exercises, challenges, the questions, problems that I have in the book or a part of it, but it is really to try to have someone to focus on their abilities, improving them and really improving their quality of life.

And it's important particularly, I'm a senior citizen, I'm almost 77 in a couple of months and I have just had a renewed interest in things that maybe I pushed aside for a while or didn't think I could do anymore. I'm talking about cognitively.

I know there's some things I can't do physically anymore but I'm finding there are a lot of things that I had forgotten or didn't know I could do. I'm going to give you an example, playing a musical instrument. I played saxophone in high school and that was over 50 years - almost well it's 60 years ago now. I have to say, yeah, I borrowed an instrument, I took some lessons and I'm now playing alto saxophone for the Power Community Band.

[0:02:53.5] PF: That's terrific.

[0:02:56.3] JB: It is terrific and it's fun and I really learn like a lot, it's like learning a new language and it really has challenged me.

[0:03:03.9] PF: Yeah, what's interesting because we hear a lot of talk about how you need to do like a puzzle for your memory or you need it to do just for cognitive reasons but your brain cardio really takes that much further and you talk about how brain cardio can increase things like our energy, our emotional wellbeing, our hope. Can you explain how that works?

[0:03:27.0] JB: Absolutely. Because, when you are thinking clearer, you know that you can do some things that you didn't think you could and it gives a sense of a refocus on purpose in life and what I can do and we could learn that having a dream, it does not come with an age restriction and I was a pediatrician for 20 years and then I did some more training, it became, I'm board certified at pediatrics and now I'm board certified in psychiatry and I've done psychiatry for the last 25 years and I'm now working with veterans.

I am seeing the entire spectrum from children, all the way up. I still remember and what a glorious thing it was to see children who are so in love with the world and the world's in love with them and to be at the center of the universe. We lose that enthusiasm and you lose some of those dreams as you grow up with all the practical things and the things that happens to everybody, growing up.

It is nice to regain some of those aspirations and realizing that 80 can be the new 50 in terms of cognitive functioning, that we can do things even different from what we've done in our life and as a senior citizen, a lot of my friends, I'm still working but a lot of my friends have retired and it doesn't have to be in what they studied before. In fact they could take a new field of study and I'm encouraging people, as part of the brain cardio lifestyle to take some online studies or go to a community college or do something, take a course and learn something that is challenging to you and also something you're interested in, and something that's fun.

Something you wanted to do but hadn't had the time to do in the past.

[0:05:24.1] PF: Yeah, because the one thing that we do see people retire and there's a pretty strong statistic of death after retirement in the year or so following retirement. Then you see people who use their retired years to, as you say, find new interest, pursue new passions and –

[0:05:44.2] JB: That is what I'm encouraging, that's what brain cardio is about.

[0:05:47.9] PF: How does that open up the rest of – how does say learning to play golf, open up the rest of your world? How does one thing relate to a broader outcome?

[0:05:58.7] JB: Well, when you try one of those things and have fun at it or successful or even, you don't have to be successful, you could be prepared to fail because if you don't, if you're not great at it, at least you tried it and you learned something from it. Failure can happen and that's okay, I wasn't afraid to fail when I picked up an [inaudible], said, I'm going to join this community band that I've heard and thought was just wonderful.

As it worked out, I could do it and so it gives me that feeling of accomplishment. But when you finally do one thing, it opens up other avenues and you're not just – a lot of the patients I see

are stuck and they think they're condition where they are right now is where it's going to be forever and there's nothing they can do to get out of that mode.

I hope with brain cardio and realizing that they're not stuck or they can become unstuck with some help so even something like learning golf, if you're not doing it in the past, it will be challenging for you, it should be fun, it's getting outside, it is socializing and the golfers that I see and I'm not one, that is not my thing. The golfers I see are having fun at it, they do it, they're outside, they're socializing and they are stimulating their brains, not just with a golfing but all the things that go with it.

Socializing, laughing, being with other people, exercising. All of those things have helped improve cognitive functioning.

[0:07:32.6] PF: You know, we do tend to start talking about cognitive function as part of the aging process. I feel kind of like we miss the boat sometimes because we wait until later in life to start emphasizing this.

What are things that we can do in our day to day lives, early on? Make a practice out of it as we go through our life that will keep us engaged, keep us through the difficult times and keep us hopeful and keep our brains vital and active even before that aging process really progresses.

[0:08:05.1] JB: That is so important and I'm going to quote some of the studies that I have read and I've used it on presentation and one of them is called N-E-U-R-O, NEURO. The N is for nutrition and that is very important in brain functioning. E is for exercise and I'm talking about physical exercise and we all need either to walk, swim, bike, do something.

[0:08:31.6] PF: Get up and move, people.

[0:08:33.5] JB: Get up and move around some. The U is for unwind and that is really about, if there's something that is so stressful in someone's life that they are in that stuck mode and feel like they cannot get out of this, they have to have a respite, some way of unloading that stresser where they can either change it or deal with it.

Like they're on the treadmill all the time that they're, it's like being in the fight or flight syndrome and there's elevated cortisol and for a while, that keeps you running but after a while, ebbing in that mode all the time could do some brain damage and we need to be able to relax and have a respite from that.

The R is for restoration and that is really sleep. So many people did not get restful sleep and they cannot possibly function well on a regular basis, if they do not get, I'm going to use two words, restful and restorative. The brain testier will store itself and the body has to restore itself.

The last part of NEURO, O, is optimize and that means, to do something to keep your brain stimulated and I'm going to add some more words to that like brain cardio.

[0:09:56.8] PF: That's really good because that's an easy way for people to remember that, it might be hard sometimes to get people to pay attention to it because one, the unwind part can be tough and then getting that really restorative restful sleep is a challenge for a lot of us.

What are some things that people can do to improve that because we've talked about that a lot at live happy now. We hear a lot of stories that you can see on livehappy.com that really talk about the value of sleep. How do we get it?

[0:10:27.6] JB: It is so important and we need to have a time at night when we get away from things that are stimulating our brain, I'm really talking about, the computers, the video games, even the news, it can be upsetting at times.

Actually don't want to watch the evening news, I do it every night pretty much but after that, there's something where there's meditation, pray, read something that so soothing and get your mindset for where you're not constantly worried about something or have something on your mind that's going to keep resurging during the night.

Then, you need to have some sort of routine, whether bathe, get in bed, lights out, no electronic devices, no TV that's going to be on and sound through the night and the room should be dark. Mattress is important and if you have problems with sleep, with obstruction and sleep apnea, holding your breath, snoring, that's fixable.

That is dramatic sometimes when people get treatment for that, where they can get some restful sleep. We try not to use medications that are really just powerful sleep medicines. Although, they're helpful, they can also be addictive where we're not able to get off of them.

[0:11:52.2] PF: Right. Yeah, I'm a big believer in meditation before medication. Try that first.

[0:11:59.1] JB: I believe that too and if they do go to medication, there is a natural over, counter melatonin which is for certainly, it is a natural thing and it does promote restful sleep. But meditation and prayer before bedtime and trying to clear your mind is helpful, the devices off in the dark room is important.

[0:12:20.3] PF: Yeah, I know, that's a challenge for a lot of people. I have a relative who actually sleeps like a lot of people with her phone, I think it's actually under her pillow and so I can shoot a text, she goes to bed many hours before I do and I can shoot a text off and she'll answer and I'm like, "What are you doing up?" She's like, "I heard it go off," and I'm like, you know, "You're always telling me how tired you are and I think we've solved the problem of why."

How do we get people to give up their devices? How do we get them to – that's a hard one for people?

[0:12:52.8] JB: It is for people and some people are really going to get addicted to it and they're just going to have to limit themselves, put it away, I mean, put it and sleeping under your pillow is the worst thing I think you can do. Even if you are not going to answer it, just it being of somebody sending you a text it, needs to be away from you. You need a break.

[0:13:13.3] PF: There is a tendency for people to be more distracted. I know sometimes I could be talking to somebody and they receive a text so they will take their phone out and they'll start answering that and you would never do that in a normal conversation, you know? You would never if I am talking to you and someone else walked up you wouldn't just start answering their question. You would continue our conversation. So how is all this increased information coming at us and all of these distraction affecting our brains?

[0:13:41.7] JB: Well I think it's make it – I use the word scattered a while ago and I think that's what it's doing. This makes us more weird and some people are addicted to it and some people

just have trouble focusing because they feel like they have to be ready for the next text or phone call or whatever it is.

[0:13:55.6] PF: Instagram post, yeah.

[0:13:57.2] JB: All of those, I am not on Instagram, so I don't get those. I think is we just use common rules of decency which is at a dinner table or out on a social event, we need to just keep it on our pockets and turn it off. We take it out later.

[0:14:13.3] PF: Well how do we offset some of that scattered brain effect? I have read studies about how our attention span is getting so much shorter and I think I even noticed that with myself whereas I used to read, sit down and read books and I might gravitate more toward magazines now. Where I want my information faster and in more bite size chunks. So how do we off set this scattered-ness that is going on with us?

[0:14:38.0] JB: I really think you have to do a focal training. I really think that category training that is in my book is very helpful for that because it is one week of doing just this, just this subject and just this topic and there are anywhere from 20 to 40 exercises for someone to do.

So if you can focus on that and follow through and it doesn't have to be my book it can be focussing on anything but take whatever it is, a novel, a set of that you want to refresh yourself with basic geometry, whatever it is and focus on that and set a timeframe and do it. Nothing but that in terms of exercising your brain and tying it to do it for a week or longer if you want to.

One of the terms about the book is humming and I will tell you where that comes from. There were some studies done on animals at MIT and it actually showed that if you gave animals, these were monkeys, information or a task to perform and you changed it from day to day to day so there's no consistency, they couldn't do any of them.

It did not sink in but if you focus on one task until it was learned, they did electrodes, it ran EEGs, they have [inaudible], it showed actually that there was a synchrony of the brain waves in the prefrontal cortex which is the front part of the brain and the hippocampus which is the bigger part of the temple brain and it's where short term memory, it is the center for short term memory but there was a humming, they used the term humming and that's why I used it in my book.

Because it is studied via categories and focus on that, you learn the material and it's this constant jumping from one thing to another that I think my grandkids are doing that the other subjects are just pushed to the wayside. It is not that important anymore.

[0:16:42.5] PF: Interesting.

[0:16:43.9] JB: Focus and stay with it. It will come and the pathways, because of a linear term brain cardio, I'm going to use the second one and this is when it's not a neurologist and this is a very respective scientific word and that is neuroplasticity.

[0:17:00.9] PF: Ah yes, we're big fans of that here.

[0:17:03.6] JB: Absolutely, that is the ability of the brain to repair and even as a part of repairing it can also make new cells and when I was growing up and going through med-school that was unheard of. In fact we were told in neuro academy to enjoy the burning cells you have today because tomorrow you are going to have less. There is a day by day hang off and the brain cannot make new cells. Thank goodness that information has been proven to be wrong.

[0:17:33.5] PF: They got it confused with hair, right?

[0:17:37.3] JB: Maybe so.

[0:17:39.6] PF: And I thank you for joining us today. You have so much to teach us and I am glad that you are out there sharing it with us.

[0:17:45.3] JB: Paula, thank you so much for having me. It was a delight talking to you and sharing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:17:54.2] CL: Welcome back to Live Happy Now. This is web editor, Chris Libby and before we leave today, we wanted to bring in a friend of the podcast, dog trainer John Miller. John is

the founder of Texas Canine Rehab and specializes in working with dogs that are aggressive or are creating challenging situations at home.

John, thank you for being here.

[0:18:11.5] JM: Thank you. Thanks for having us.

[0:18:12.9] CL: Great, I'm glad we are talking to you about this because I think this is a topic that really doesn't get talked about a lot. We are coming up on the end of summer. It is approaching fast, back to school for families, back to school is on everybody's mind. It is a lot hectic, situations are changing and to transition in the household. So what we don't think about is how that affects our four-legged family members.

So how can this drastic change affect our dogs when they've had this awesome summer of playing outside and getting lots of attention and then all of a sudden, they are left home alone with a sad face looking out the window?

[0:18:48.7] JM: Right, so instead of using the word change I like to use the word routine because we are changing the routine but to completely change up the routine, you know for example in this case, we are talking about kids going off to school, maybe parents changing their work routines and just completely changing the daily activities of their life, that will definitely - is likely to set a dog off balance if things aren't done the right way.

So that's why whenever we are about to come up on a big change, let's say school is starting up in this case, that's what we are talking about now, we have to make sure that we keep some sort of constant there meaning that before the person left and after the person left, there is still some sort of similar pattern that is going on. For example, the biggest recommendation that we would have is walking your dog. So if your dog is being walked every day and then you're also walking your dog in a good way daily after school has started, then they're more likely to be okay with the change because they still have that constant activity in their life which is following you.

Following the humans in the house to eventually get what they want which is maybe hanging out with you or getting fed or getting a treat or a bone or a toy or playtime. So that's what's most important.

[0:20:05.2] CL: So then what are some signs that we can look for in our dog's behavior that might indicate that there is some emotional stress there?

[0:20:11.7] JM: Whenever a dog was doing just fine before and all of a sudden starts to have weird behaviors, starts to whine a lot or just anything that's out of the ordinary it's probably because there is some sort of lifestyle change that there was structure there before or at least the dog believed that there was structure and then all of a sudden they felt like things were out of the ordinary and things were not comfortable for them.

[0:20:36.2] CL: What are some things that we can do to prepare our dogs for a big change?

[0:20:40.2] JM: One thing that I would do is especially if you are about to go through a change, in this case we are talking about school coming up and kids going to school, the routine changing a little bit for the parents as well. So the best thing that you could do is get them into a pattern before school starts. If the only thing they know is, "The kids are home all day and I don't get walked but the kids are home all day and I get to play with them all day."

And all of a sudden, "The kids are not home all day and I am just here bored." Then that's why they act up because they had a certain routine, they had a certain lifestyle and now that lifestyle is gone. So we have to provide our dog the lifestyle that our dog needs. Walk our dog every day, do activities with our dog and going back to what I was saying, you don't have to walk them for two miles. You don't have to wear yourself out.

You just want to show them the daily exercise of "Look, follow me around." There is no one specific way for each dog but there is one way that we can help each and every dog regardless of their personalities and that is just providing them leadership and saying, "Look I've got everything under control. Follow me and then you will get what you want." And just always providing that structure regardless of kids going to school, job changing or any of that stuff.

[0:21:55.6] CL: Well this has been great. I guess the lesson is be a leader for your dog because they are a part of your pack. Thanks John for joining us.

[0:22:02.1] JM: Thank you.

[0:22:02.7] CL: This has been great information and I hope everybody benefits from it.

[0:22:05.9] JM: Awesome. Thank you very much. Thanks for having us.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:22:07.8] PF: If you'd like to learn more about Dr. Joe Bates and his latest book, *Making Your Brain Hum: 12 Weeks to a Smarter You*, visit us at livehappynow.com. We'll tell you how you can get a 50% discount off his book as well as his free e-book, *Tips for a Brain Healthy Lifestyle*, that includes some of his puzzles and brain cardio exercises.

As always, we're going to give you a special gift just for listening. If you go to the Live Happy Store at livehappy.com, enter the promo code "podcastdeal" you get 20% off anything and everything in the store. It is a great place for that back to school shopping or just stocking up on your mop top pens.

Special thanks today to the Momentous Institute for bringing us this episode of Live Happy Now. Momentous Institute 7th Annual Change in the Arts Conference will be held on September 27th and 28th at Omni Dallas Hotel. Visit momentousinstitute.org to register and find out more about the panel of education and mental health experts you can enjoy at that conference.

That is all we have time for today so please join us back here next week and until then, remember to make every day a happy one.

[END]