



Behaviour Management – A Brief Guide to How Our Brain Works!

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Introduction

Managing our own behaviour and helping our client's to manage theirs, requires us to understand our general thought and behaviour-making processes.

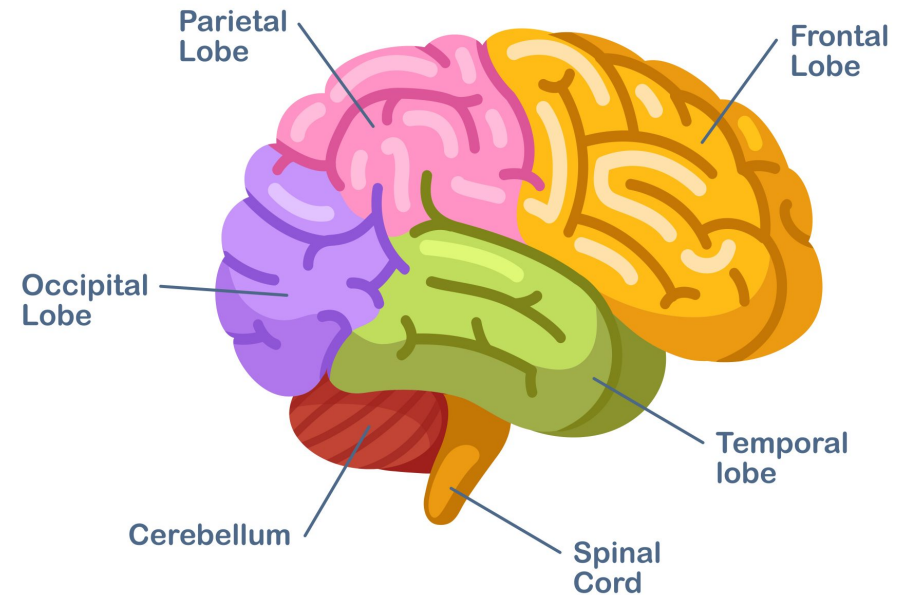
If we can understand why and how poor decisions are made, then we can help to influence a more sensible decision-making process, positively influencing health and fitness choices.

The following slides are a very brief introduction to our behavioural psychology – particularly in relation to mind management and the controlling of unhealthy behaviours.

Anatomy of Our Thinking

There are 7 brain areas working together

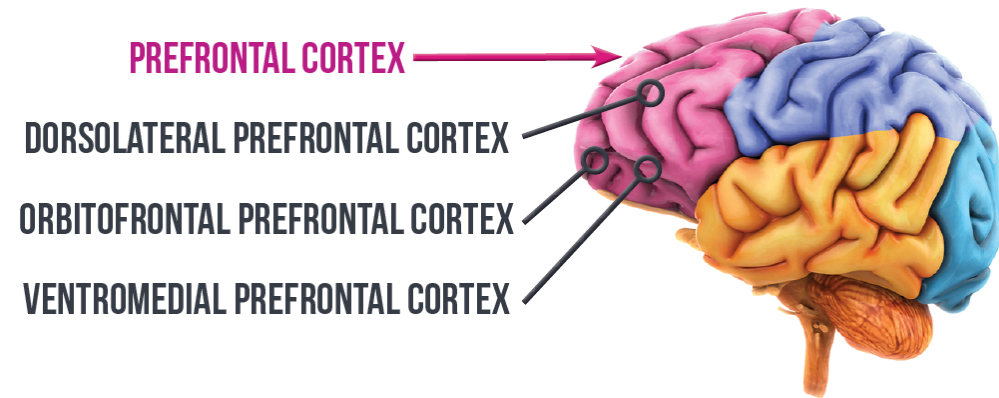
- Frontal*
 - Limbic*
 - Parietal*
 - Occipital
 - Temporal
 - Cerebellum
 - Brain Stem
- * These make up our 'Psychological brain'



The Frontal Cortex

The Frontal Cortex plans complex cognitive behaviour, is involved in decision making, personality expression and moderating behaviour.

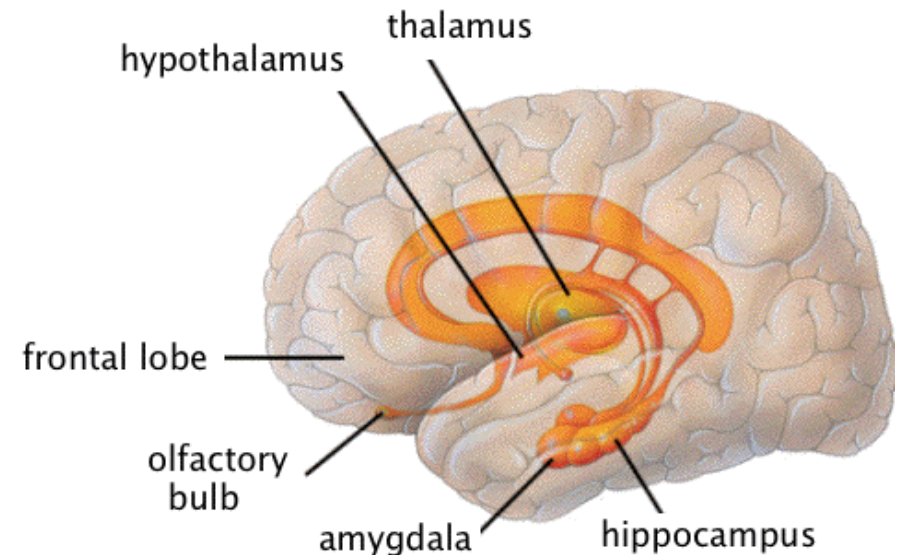
It is a calm, rational thinking, responsible, sensible and logical mind.



The Limbic System

The Limbic System is a collection of structures responsible for emotional responsiveness including; attention, motivation and safety. It is partly responsible for our instinctive 'flight/fight/freeze' response, which influences both our endocrine system and our autonomic nervous system.

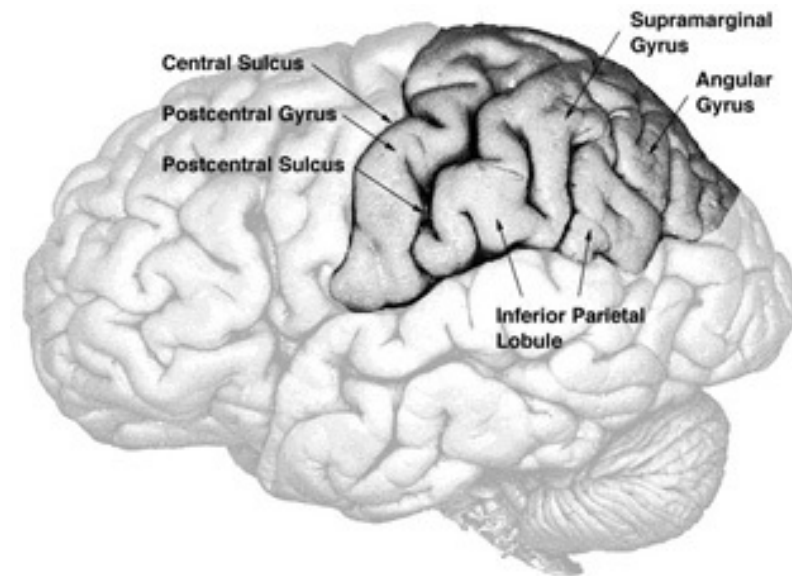
The Limbic System is often referred to as the 'Emotional mind' that thinks independently from us. It is not good or bad. It could be very constructive, or it could equally be very destructive.



The Parietal Lobe

The Parietal Lobe is important for the formation and manipulation of memory information.

The Parietal Lobe is referred to as the 'Information store' that the Limbic and Frontal minds save into. We then use that information to help make decisions on our behaviour. In effect, our memories help to 'feed' our behaviours either positively or negatively.



Where We Go Wrong

When it comes to behavioural choices, our previous experiences (manipulated in our Parietal Lobe) as well as natural 'instinct' (under Limbic control) often cause us to shy away of the hardships that health and fitness may bring (restricted diets, hard physical effort etc).

These two brain regions combined can 'dominate' our more 'reasonable' Frontal Cortex – leading us to think EMOTIONALLY, not logically!

Traits of an 'Emotional Mind'

- Jumps to an opinion
- Thinks in black and white
- It can be paranoid
- It tends to catastrophise when things aren't going well
- It can be irrational
- Decisions can be based purely on emotion
- Illogical justifications for behaviour can be made
- When things go well it's as much by luck as judgment

None of these traits are going to help with health and fitness goals. Of course an emotional mind is also responsible for some good aspects of behaviour too! We just need to keep it 'in check'!

Emotion-led Behaviour

In the context of our health, fitness and nutrition, it can be a dangerous concept to allow decision making based on emotional thinking! We may:

- Skip or cut short training sessions
- Put unhealthy snacks in our shopping basket
- Reflect on previous fitness experiences negatively, exacerbating resistance to a healthier lifestyle

For better chances of a healthier lifestyle, it may therefore be better to have 'Logic-led' behaviour

Logic-led Behaviour

Logic-led behaviour can help us make healthy choices. It is:

- Evidence-based
- Rational
- In context and with perspective
- Open to all shades of grey – not just black and white!

By using logic, we would:

- Stick to our training plan!
- Put the chocolate Hobnobs back on the shop shelf!
- Take the positives from our experiences to reinforce and motivate us going forward!

Our Responsibility

'You are not responsible for the nature of your emotional mind, but are responsible for managing it.' (Prof Steve Peters, 2012)

By managing your emotion effectively, you are far more likely to be successful and happy in your health & fitness journey / life in general!

Managing Your Mind

Recognising your own behaviour traits as they occur is key:

- If you feel yourself thinking in black and white, pause, reflect, rationalise, and consider all of the alternatives.
- If you feel anxious, pause and work out why, listen to your anxious mind, but reason with it and plan a strategy to overcome it's thoughts
- Listen to yourself. If you know deep-down that your self-talk isn't good for you, be determined and stop that process. Put an intervention in place so that you learn to think and speak to yourself more positively
- Review and learn from past behaviour – frame things positively
- Set aside 'Development time' and make this a habit
- Pay attention to your emotional thinking, it serves a purpose, but don't let it dominate your behaviour!