

Books: The Healthy Aging Brain - Sustaining Attachment, Attaining Wisdom
by Louis Cozolino, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2008. 380 pp. ISBN: 978-0-393-705-13-3

The book is written in an informal, almost chatty way that is immensely reassuring if you happen to possess an aging brain. Even if you don't, the book is both interesting and reassuring in what it reveals about the various stages of growth in the brain leading up to 'old age' and what happens to the brain as it ages along with the body it's parked in. Cozolino's revelations are solidly based in social neuroscience, his sources are referenced at the end of each section, and all are listed in an appendix at the back of the book.

Cozolino, in fact, takes his primary thesis from neurological research into the aging brain: 'The brain was designed to change, so the old adage 'use it or lose it' has a great deal of neural validity,' he writes. 'The aging brain retains the capacity to birth new neurons and build new brain structures but, just like when we were children, it continues to grow in an experience dependent manner and has to be stimulated by environmental, relational, and internal challenges.'

, a Pepperdine University psychology professor, begins *The Healthy Aging Brain* with the developmental cycle of the brain from birth through adolescence. His description of how the brain of an infant changes to acclimate itself to the world is fascinating.

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Written by NHA

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Cozolino then traces the development of the brain from adolescence onwards so that you begin to understand exactly how brains mature, and you get perspective on some of your own behaviors at various ages along the way. We do, for example, continue to build neuronal pathways as long as we remain active both mentally and physically, a relatively recent revelation shared by researchers. Other research shows that mental exercise is the key to building new neuronal and synaptic structures in the aging brain and remain active and productive at an advanced age. Keeping your brain healthy is a lot like improving your tennis game, Cozolino implies, take it out there on the court and practice with it!

Cozolino reveals that with age comes that great intangible: wisdom. With development there is a shift in locus, from the rear brain regions responsible for controlling our most basic responses to a more balanced cooperation between the rear and frontal networks which are involved in social behavior, emotional regulation, judgment and decisions. With the frontal nets rising in cranial stature, healthy old people learn the wisdom of emotional stability. We tend to be more interested in those around us and in the events of the past and are well able to articulate what we think.

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If you have occasional fears of losing your marbles as you age, I highly recommend reading *The Healthy Aging Brain*. This book, reassures readers that mental deterioration need not accompany growing old, and to that end, Cozolino even provides an appendix (*52 Ways to Avoid Hardening of the Categories: A Program of Personal Experiments*) listing 52 different activities to keep older brains vibrant. Among his more appealing suggestions:

"Play with children whenever possible."

"Go to a new restaurant and eat something that sounds a little strange."

"Try a week without television."

And my absolute favorite...

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"Take every opportunity to contradict stereotypes about older adults."

Sources

Original review by Margaret Guthrie

TheScientist

<http://www.the-scientist.com/news/display/55174/>

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