

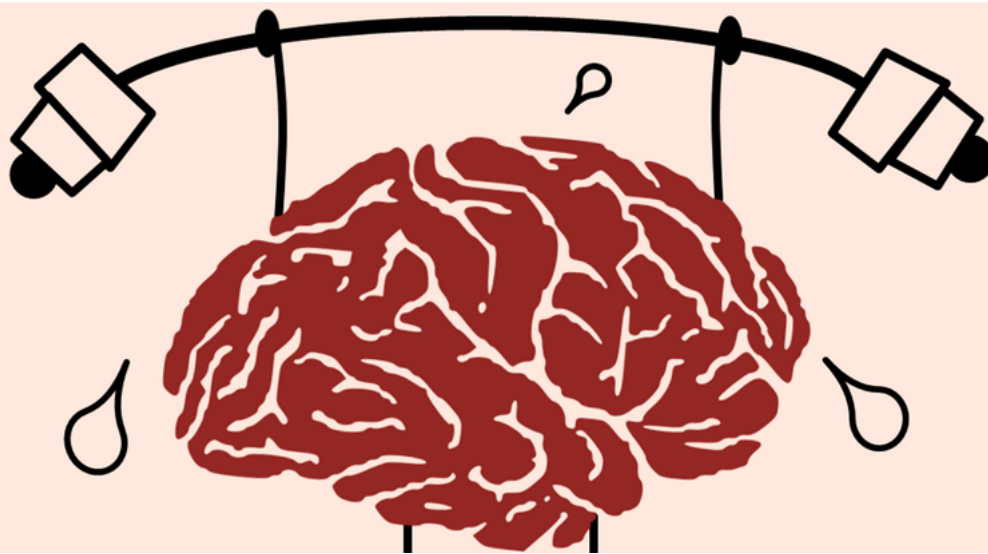
Subscribe to the OSS Weekly Newsletter!

Sign-Up Here (<https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/newsletter>)

Home (/oss/)

Brain Health: Max Lugavere and the Bait-and-Switch Maneuver

In trying to find a treatment for his mom’s neurodegenerative condition, a journalist turned “brain food expert” believes his one-year deep dive into research articles exceeds the expertise of top neurologists



[Jonathan Jarry, MSc \(/oss/articles-by-author/Jonathan Jarry, MSc\)](#) | 30 May 2018

[f \(http://www.facebook.com/share?u=https%3A//www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/quackery/brain-health-max-and-bait-an-manuever&t=Brain%20Health%3A%20Max%20Lugavere%20and%20the-and-Switch%20Mand-Switch%20Maneuver&summary=When%20booking%20a%20hotel%20or-switch%E2%80%9D%20on%20you%3A%20baiting%20you%20with%20](http://www.facebook.com/share?u=https%3A//www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/quackery/brain-health-max-and-bait-an-manuever&t=Brain%20Health%3A%20Max%20Lugavere%20and%20the-and-Switch%20Mand-Switch%20Maneuver&summary=When%20booking%20a%20hotel%20or-switch%E2%80%9D%20on%20you%3A%20baiting%20you%20with%20)
<http://twitter.com/share?url=https%3A//www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/quackery/brain-health-max-and-bait-an-manuever&count=horizontal&via=McGillOSS&text=Brain%20Health%3A%20Max%20Lugavere%20and%20the-and-Switch%20Maneuver&counturl=www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/quackery/brain-health-max-and-bait-an-manuever>

When booking a hotel online, you often see a much more appealing price than you end up paying. When you’re closing the transaction, that’s when they hit you with the “resort fee” and you realize they’ve pulled the old “bait-and-switch” on you: baiting you with an appealing rate,

only to switch it to a higher one when you've committed. I've also observed this maneuver in the world of alternative medicine, and it's not always the product of deception.

Max Lugavere is a health and science journalist who's been described as "one of the new generation of 'bright lights'." He's young, tall, buff, and handsome, and has authored a *New York Times* best-selling book called *Genius Foods: Become Smarter, Happier, and More Productive While Protecting Your Brain for Life* (https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/35008533-genius-foods?from_search=true). He speaks confidently about how to improve your lifestyle—or "upgrade yourself" as [his website states](https://www.maxlugavere.com) (<https://www.maxlugavere.com>),—to reduce your risk of developing dementia and other neurological diseases.

He doesn't shy away from speaking about his motivation: his mom, a fast-walking New Yorker, started to exhibit worrying symptoms, like brain fog and gait changes, before being diagnosed with both Parkinson disease and Alzheimer disease. And the top neurologists they consulted—experts at such well-respected institutions as Johns Hopkins and Columbia University—couldn't do much for her. Lugavere calls it "diagnose and adios". But in searching for potential treatments for his mom and preventative measures for himself, he stumbled upon a trove of research papers that seemed to offer an alternative to "neurological nihilism".

I first became aware of Lugavere because of his appearance on the long-form talk show *The Rubin Report*. [That interview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwWxkXwTn24) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwWxkXwTn24>), which was seen either in full or in part over 122,000 times, was actually, all things considered, quite reasonable. He pointed out that there isn't a lot of evidence that butter improves brain health, thus addressing the whole "butter coffee" myth; he argued that we need to reduce our consumption of ultra-processed food; and he recommended a big bowl of salad once a day. He even understood the difference between observational studies (which cannot prove causation) and randomized controlled trials (which address this question more directly). He wants us all to get enough quality sleep and to take a break from social media once in a while.

I can't argue against any of this. In this one-hour interview, he ends up sounding balanced and well informed. But there was a hint of the "bait-and-switch" I would experience later when he stated the following:

"PubMed [a portal that allows you to search the biomedical literature] is something that anybody can search. Not everybody is going to be qualified to the degree that they can understand, for example, medical literature or even cut through the jargon but... there's a lot that people can glean from what is readily available."

This appeal to self-empowerment—that "information wants to be free", as he put it a few seconds earlier—is quite common in the alternative medical community. But knowledge is not the same as wisdom. Many studies are poorly designed and executed, yet they end up getting published just the same. How can the average person tell the difference between a good and a bad study when a committee of actual scientists seems unable to turn the bad ones away from being published?

When you go to Lugavere's website, there's a pop-up message, made to look like a social media friend request, that asks, "Want my free supplement guide?"

I did.

The four-page document I received listed "11 supplements to supercharge your brain". There was an entry on omega-3 fatty acids ("I'm religious about my high-quality fish oil supplementation") and one on astaxanthin (where the research is apparently limited but enough to be included in his regimen, he tells us). And once you've received this guide, you're added to his mailing list. And the rabbit hole starts to get deeper.

He tells you that his book has “no bias” (an impossible task) and “no B.S.” He writes, “I’m not selling anything. (Seriously!)” Except he is.

He sends you an email about these amazing sunglasses to help you filter out the blue light that keeps you awake at night. He knows the founder of the company personally, just so you know, so you can grab a pair and save 20\$. He’s also really worried about airborne particles causing Alzheimer’s disease, so he reached out to the manufacturer of a fantastic air filter, and you can purchase it for 299\$ instead of 599\$.

The rabbit hole gets deeper and darker on Lugavere’s brand-new podcast, *The Genius Life* (<https://www.maxlugavere.com/podcast-1/>). Each episode features an interview with a so-called expert. He brings a holistic health coach on [episode 2](https://www.maxlugavere.com/podcast/the-genius-life-2-the-1-hack-that-changes-your-life-sarah-anne-stewart) (<https://www.maxlugavere.com/podcast/the-genius-life-2-the-1-hack-that-changes-your-life-sarah-anne-stewart>), whose father had terminal kidney cancer and, she claims, cured himself by abandoning Western medicine and fine-tuning his nutrition instead. In [episode 9](https://www.maxlugavere.com/podcast/the-genius-life-9-the-foods-that-can-improve-your-smile-steven-lin-dds) (<https://www.maxlugavere.com/podcast/the-genius-life-9-the-foods-that-can-improve-your-smile-steven-lin-dds>), the guest is a “functional dentist (<https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/dys-functional-medicine-comes-to-dentistry/>)” who says crooked teeth happen because we’re not eating healthy. His website promotes recipes for [homemade mouthwash](https://www.drstevenlin.com/dental-diet-nutrition/) (<https://www.drstevenlin.com/dental-diet-nutrition/>) and for [healing cavities naturally](https://www.drstevenlin.com/natural-dental-remedies/) (<https://www.drstevenlin.com/natural-dental-remedies/>). And the episode gets a sponsorship from a Toronto-based supplement company. Lugavere really likes their “gut health powder”.

Make no mistake: Max Lugavere is building a business. And there’s nothing wrong with this. But his business seems to be constructed on the principle that, if there’s a scientific study on this, it’s worth endorsing. I don’t think this is a cynical cash grab. Rather, he simply seems ill-equipped (as a college major in film and psychology) to *interpret* the scientific literature as opposed to reading it.

A bait-and-switch maneuver is when an appealing truth is presented first, while a less appealing, often controversial or flat-out wrong belief is hidden, only to be revealed once trust has been earned. Scientology is probably the most extreme and well known example of the bait-and-switch, approaching strangers about anxiety and trauma only to reveal much later the story of thetans, Xenu, and volcanoes.

On other people’s turf, Max Lugavere appears like a proponent of common-sense solutions to ill health—better nutrition, exercise and sleep—but it’s only when you start to trust him that he reveals himself to be a naive believer in anything that has a study behind it. His book has received endorsements from people like Dr. Oz and functional medicine proponent Mark Hyman, and this company is telling.

In his book, *Genius Foods*, Lugavere writes: “Connecting the dots requires a certain level of creative thinking.” No. It requires rigour, scientific training, and experience.

Let’s see how long it takes before Lugavere has his own line of brain-boosting supplements. I give him a year.

[@crackedscience](https://twitter.com/crackedscience) (<https://twitter.com/crackedscience>)

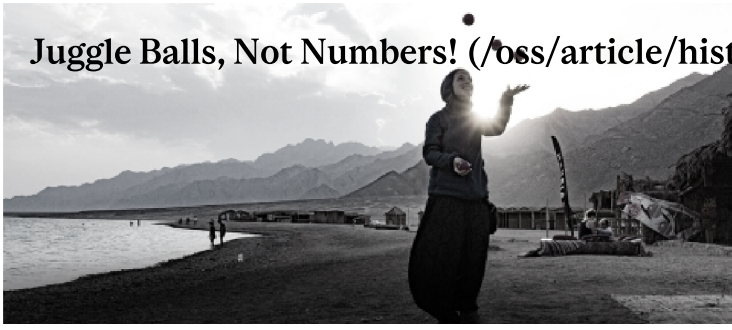
Want to engage with this content? [Comment on our Facebook page!](https://www.facebook.com/McGillOSS/posts/1748063168566464) (<https://www.facebook.com/McGillOSS/posts/1748063168566464>).

Keywords:

Max Lugavere (/oss/category/tags/max-lugavere) brain (/oss/category/tags/brain)
bait and switch (/oss/category/tags/bait-and-switch)

What to read next

Juggle Balls, Not Numbers! (/oss/article/history/juggle-balls-not-numbers)



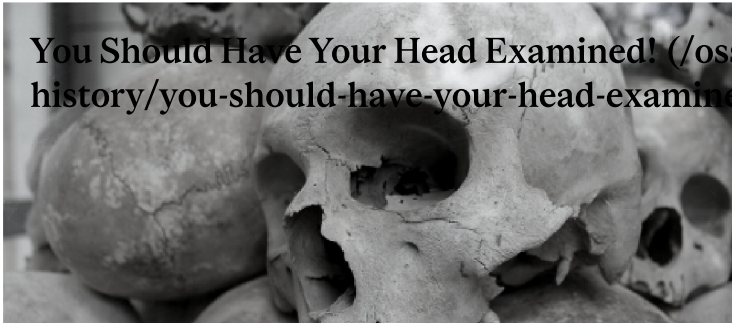
14 Jan 2022

Are You Left-Handed? Science Still Yearns to Know Why (/oss/article/health-general-science/are-you-left-handed-science-still-learns-know-why)



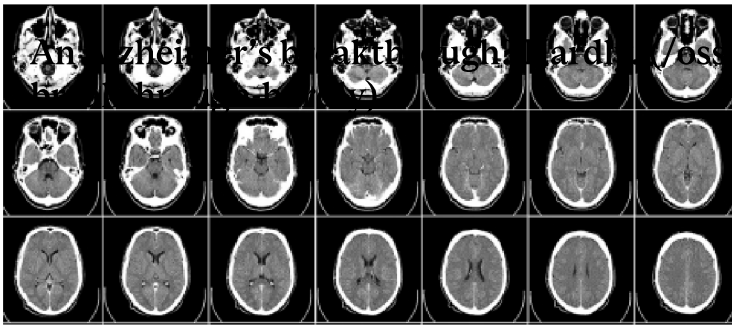
17 Sep 2021

You Should Have Your Head Examined! (/oss/article/pseudoscience-history/you-should-have-your-head-examined)



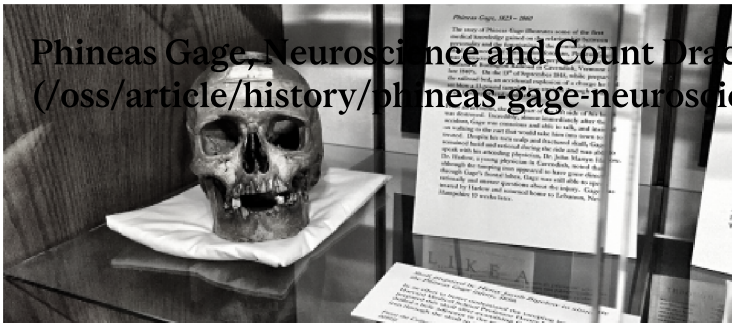
30 Jun 2021

Anesthesia's Health Impact (/oss/article/health/alzheimers-)



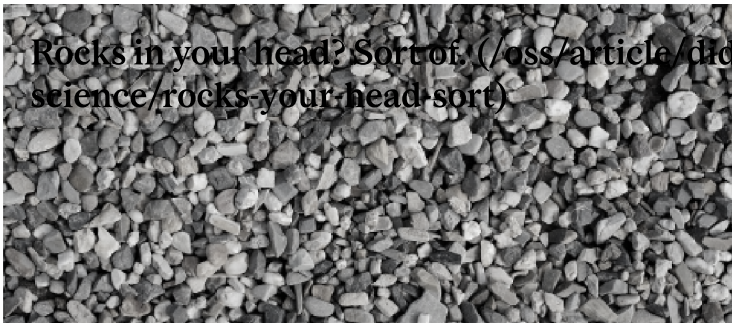
12 Jun 2021

Phineas Gage, Neuroscience and Count Dracula (/oss/article/history/phineas-gage-neuroscience-and-count-dracula)



14 May 2021

Rocks in your head? Sort of (/oss/article/did-you-know-general-science/rocks-your-head-sort)



2 Oct 2020

<https://www.mcgill.ca>

Copyright © 2022 McGill University

[Accessibility \(https://www.mcgill.ca/accessibility\)](https://www.mcgill.ca/accessibility) [Log in](#)  [\(/oss/saml_login?destination=node/7118\)](/oss/saml_login?destination=node/7118)