



# **Rewired to Relate - Text**

Chapter 3

## **Brain care**

# Brain Care

Like any other part of your body, your brain needs looking after to perform at its best. Developing your prefrontal cortex enables you to recognise the impact of your limbic system and learn to manage it as needed.

We have investigated two important brain regions:



- the emotional, powerful, always-on **limbic system** that drives much of our behaviour, sometimes to our detriment
- the prefrontal cortex or **PFC** which handles complexity, provides reason, helps us focus and manages emotions; it is weak, tires easily and will easily cede control to the limbic system

Most of our Rewired concepts and tools will be supported by the PFC so it is important that you can develop it. It is also essential to recognise the impact of your limbic system and learn to manage it when needed.

This chapter will support you to create brain-friendly practices and habits that will develop a strong and healthy brain, build your resilience and support your everyday working interactions.

## When your prefrontal cortex is tired

As you saw in the previous chapter, when your prefrontal cortex (PFC) is tired, your emotional, powerful limbic system will drive more of your decisions.

You will most likely have had an experience where your PFC was tired or lazy.

### Prefrontal cortex

Nearly all of us will have had an experience of how lazy our prefrontal cortex (PFC) can be, and how quickly it can tire. Which of the challenges below apply to you?

- At the end of a busy day at work I find my patience is short
- I find it hard to concentrate on big projects when I start in the afternoon
- When I am very busy and stressed, I find it hard to resist my cravings
- During the day my ability to focus reduces
- I find it hard to make decisions
- I feel mentally drained after a morning meeting



*Yes, unfortunately, stress and intense activities use up PFC capacity and then we have less ability to control the limbic system.*

Getting specific about what drains your prefrontal cortex allows you to plan activities that recharge it. You will revisit the situations you have identified here at the end of the chapter and create an action plan to recharge.

## Caring for your prefrontal cortex

When the PFC is depleted in situations like the ones you just identified, other parts of the brain respond by:

- creating an overly simple model of the world that is easy to understand
- relying on biases and shortcuts
- seeking dopamine, possibly at the expense of others
- making assumptions and believing them
- being more easily triggered

Long term stresses on the PFC can cause stress-related illnesses, forgetfulness, burn out and difficulty learning something new. We need to pro-actively take care of the PFC to keep it functioning well.

## What drains your PFC battery

Life's multitude of stresses wear down our PFC capacity each day. We also need to understand that the stress hormone cortisol is toxic to the body and brain - it increases the aging process, it impairs our memory and our capacity to learn. Each of the following will add a little bit of stress and use up a bit of your precious PFC energy as your brain tries to manage that stress:

- managing limbic threats and needs
- change
- news and drama
- VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity
- a difficult environment (noise, poor light, smells, clutter, etc)
- not enough sleep
- poor nutrition or a very restrictive diet
- task switching, aka "multi-tasking"
- distractions
- being 'always on' on multiple messaging systems
- too much to do
- feeling overwhelmed
- working without a break
- back-to-back virtual meetings
- spending break time on digital devices
- skipping lunch
- dealing with pain
- long or stressful commutes
- working at home with too many distractions
- worrying about your health and well-being
- concern for family members

Are there any other life events that drain energy from your PFC? If so, write them down for your own awareness.

## How it works

When your PFC is charged, you will be more effective at managing your limbic reactions and needs. This means you can be more patient with others, more curious about their ideas, more intentional about your impact and generally more collaborative.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness increases your capacity to focus, think clearly, manage your limbic system and to work in harmony with others (and all their limbic needs and reactions).

There are several ways to create a mindful state. The ABC model and meditation practices work well. There are also other ways to take a step back and give your PFC a chance to recharge. Try different approaches and notice what works best for you and your brain.

## Recharging your PFC battery

We now know what depletes our PFC. How, then, can we recharge it?

The answer will be slightly different for everyone. To help you answer, consider which of these activities give you energy:

- a good night's sleep
- taking breaks during the day
- eating healthy foods
- exercising
- going for a short walk
- breathing deeply
- taking breaks from technology
- getting outside
- talking to someone
- taking breaks from drama (news, dramatic people, limbic reactions)
- practising mindfulness (e.g. a short meditation)



Recent sleep research indicates that sleep is a non-negotiable necessity. All the other items on this list will help you recharge your PFC during the day. Experiment and find out which ones work best for you.

When your PFC is charged, you will be more effective at managing your limbic reactions and needs. This means you can be more patient with others, more curious about their ideas, more intentional about your impact and generally more collaborative.

A fully charged PFC also gives you clarity and focus for the work you need to do on your own.