

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN #15

ENERGY AND STRENGTH

© Rick Hanson, Rick Mendius, Jan Hanson, 2008

Natural Interventions for Feeling Strong

Diet

- Eat primarily vegetables and protein, fruit, and some whole non-gluten grains.
- Be serious about protein. If you're a vegetarian, inspect your protein intake; review food combinations, investigate alternative protein sources, and consider if you might be allergic to any of your typical protein sources (see just below); learn from the "raw" community, which is generally doing an excellent job with all this.
- Keep carbohydrates low, particularly with minimal sugar and flour products!
- Avoid food allergens if you have any symptoms (e.g., G.I. problems, congestion, fatigue, brain fog). The main food allergens are: gluten (wheat, oats, rye, barley, spelt, kamut), dairy, and soy; eggs and citrus fruits may also be problematic.

Vitamins

- Always start with a good high potency multi-vitamin/mineral. They should have 100% of the daily value (D.V.) of minerals, and very high B-vitamins (500% or more of the D.V.).
- Take a high B-complex: B-50 or B-100 complex.
- Use B-12 as a sublingual. The type "methylcobalamin" is best. 1000 – 5000 mcg.
- Take Vitamin B-5 (pantathenic acid). Therapeutic dose: 250 – 500 mg.

Minerals

- Magnesium is important. 400 – 1000 mg. Magnesium citrate will loosen your stool, but magnesium glycinate will not.
- Iron is critical for energy. Have your iron levels checked, and supplement accordingly.

Amino Acids

- A balanced amino acid (AA) mix, containing just AAs or all "essential AAs," can be very energizing.
- The neurotransmitters, norepinephrine and dopamine, lift energy, mood, and attention. They are made from the amino acids, phenylalanine and tyrosine. You can try 500 – 1000 mg of one or the other. (Take in the morning on an empty stomach)

However:

- Always enhance your serotonin before enhancing dopamine and norepinephrine. Use 50 – 150 mg of 5-HTP, the precursor to serotonin (also on an empty stomach in the morning).

Optimize gastro-intestinal health

- Use beneficial bacteria.
- Have an assessment if you have G.I. symptoms.

Hormones

- Thyroid sets the basic rate for metabolism. TSH should really be under 3.0.
- Estrogen for women and testosterone for men (and somewhat for women).

Feeling Strong Exercise

Let's explore the felt sense, the *experience* of feeling strong.

Take a breath and come into yourself. I suggest you leave your eyes open for this.

Imagine coming home from a long day of hard but rewarding work . . . And plopping yourself down on a comfortable chair and really relaxing . . . Just resting . . . Being aware of things, without any need to engage with them . . . Just resting in awareness itself . . . Feeling so relaxed . . . Things come through awareness, but awareness itself is so restful . . . Perhaps a simple sense of just being a body here . . . Without any effort . . . Resting in awareness . . . Awareness itself always whole and intact . . . Perhaps feeling the strength in simple awareness, always clear and whole and everlasting, no matter what ever passes through it . . .

Now, in that relaxed awareness, see if you can sense the vitality in your own body. And always, if there is anything uncomfortable in the awareness of your body, please shift to something else that seems strong, such as the hills around us, or tall trees, or someone you know – and ideally, evokes a sense of strength within you. That said, I will keep referring to breathing and your body, and just substitute other things if you like.

So, you are sensing how your breathing, itself, is lasting . . . How your breathing has a strength of its own . . . Perhaps sensing your muscles, your capacity to move in whatever direction you choose, toward or away . . . The animal strength in your innate being . . .

Recall a time when you felt really strong . . . Make it real for yourself, really seeing yourself in that situation . . . Bring up those feelings of strength right now . . . Present in your strong breathing, energy and strength in your arms and legs . . . The same strength from that time in your powerful heart . . . Whatever you can feel in yourself is fine . . . While continuing to open to the sense that your being is strong, and clear, and determined . . .

Recall another time when you felt really strong . . . Making it real for yourself, really seeing yourself in that situation . . . Bringing up those feelings of strength right now . . . Whatever you can feel in yourself is fine . . . While continuing to open to the sense that your being is strong, and clear, and determined . . .

Now, continuing to feel strong, see if you can bring to mind a sense of a person, or a group of people, who support or supported you . . . Make this sense as real as possible, perhaps imagining the setting or the face of the person (or people) . . . See if you can let yourself feel supported . . . valued . . . believed in . . . Sensing how this feeling of support can increase your feelings of strength . . . Even helping these connections be made in your mind – and thus your brain – between the liking and respect and love and encouragement coming to you from others and your own feelings of strength and energy . . .

Notice any other feelings coming up, too, perhaps opposite feelings of wanting support and not getting it . . . or any kind of resistance inside to feeling supported . . . If this is arising, that's fine – just notice it and let it be and let it go and turn your attention back to the sense of being with people who like and support you . . . And how those feelings of support increase your sense of strength . . .

Bring to mind other people who support you or have supported you . . . Make it as real as possible . . . Keep exploring the feeling of being supported: what are the sensations of it? The emotions? The posture or attitude of your body? The thoughts, the view of yourself or the world?

Keep exploring the connections between feeling supported and feeling strong.

Lastly, abiding in whatever sense of strength is present, bring to awareness a sense of the many people around you . . . Relaxed in that sense of strength, see if you can feel a kind of spaciousness that can allow others to flow through . . . Just abiding as a strong and energetic body and mind here, no need to grasp or struggle in any way . . . The thoughts and feelings of others flowing through you like wind through the leaves of a deeply rooted tree . . . Perhaps feeling a kind of connectedness with the world that is a deep source of strength . . . Spacious, and relaxed, and easy . . . Undisturbed in the strength that is in your breathing, your awareness, the clarity of your mind, the wholeness of your body . . .

- Some research on willpower: Self-control depletes glucose, making it harder to exercise self-control on a second task. Self-control also benefits from sleep and rest. There are wide individual differences.

- In the nervous system, strength and energy are the result of three factors, or systems: a top-down, frontal lobe, purposes/plans/values/views/executive functions component; a mid-tier, limbic-system, felt, emotional commitments component; and a bottom-up, brain stem, arousal/rewarding of resolution, animal-never-say-die component.

Consider which of these is the strongest, and which is the weakest, and that will tell you a lot about how to help yourself. Build on strengths and shore up weaknesses . . .

- The importance of internalized positive states. Notably strength and feeling cared for.
- How our sense of strength is sensitive to feeling supported, with individual differences.
- The brain as a simulation machine. The survival benefits. The drawbacks, especially in modern, busy lives. The opportunities for using its simulation capabilities for happiness, love, and wisdom.
- The brain works in terms of paired opposites: excitation balanced by inhibition, limbic system regulated by frontal lobes. Allows for layers of complexity and very dynamic regulation: inhibition of inhibition = excitation . . .

This machinery founded on dualism gives rise to informational processes of meaning that are also dualistic: figure/ground, subject/object, self/other, us/them, this/that. Thinking about black, you also think about white; things defined by what they are not.

Also more elaborated forms of dualism, such as Hegel's dialectics, or the Taoist Yin/Yang.

Feeling Weak

Of course, one form of natural dualism is that when we start thinking about strength, it brings up memories or feelings of weakness.

Paradoxically, accepting feeling weak is a path to feeling strong: The act of accepting is itself an action of strength . . . Accepting leads to a release of feelings that undermine sense of strength (e.g., anger at self, shame, defeat, despair) . . . Being able to tolerate feeling weak, and thus risk feeling it, empowers you to reach higher in strong ways.

Let's explore those feelings of weakness for a bit, and then explore lovingkindness for yourself when you're feeling outnumbered, unable.

Exercise

Bring to mind a sense of safety here, as best you can.

Decide to let yourself explore feeling small and weak without getting overwhelmed by those feelings. I recommend you explore intermediate intensity feelings, NOT overwhelming experiences of trauma.

Recall a time you felt weak . . . unable . . . defeated . . . Mindfully explore the aspects of that experience: the sensations, emotions, thoughts, wants . . . And then bring to awareness a knowing of some of the external factors or forces that just overpowered you, with an acknowledgement of their objective power . . . feeling an awareness of how your feeling small or weak arose from objective conditions . . .

Let that one go and recall another time you felt weak . . . unable . . . defeated . . . Mindfully explore the aspects of that experience, too: the sensations, emotions, thoughts, wants . . . And then bring to awareness a knowing of some of the external factors or forces that just overpowered you, with an acknowledgement of their objective power . . . feeling an awareness of how your feeling small or weak arose from objective conditions . . .

Notice that your space of awareness continues - itself strong and able to hold and bear the feelings of weakness . . .

Now, see if you can get an image or sense of yourself, or a part of yourself, now or in the past, while feeling small or weak . . . perhaps a time when you were young, or group of times . . . And then see if you can bring feelings of compassion and kindness to that person who feels small or weak . . . Perhaps bringing to mind someone who you know feels kindness toward you – and drawing on the sense of that person caring for you to extend compassion and kindness toward the small or weak parts of yourself . . .

If you like, bring to mind other experiences of feeling small or weak, and see if you can bring compassion and kindness to those experiences, too . . . If you like, drawing on the sense of being cared for by others . . .

Now see if you can explore a sense of accepting feelings of weakness . . . not preferring them, but not recoiling from them . . . or resisting them . . . or feeling ashamed of yourself because they arise – caused by conditions like anything else . . .

And now let's take just one more minute to rest in a general sense of compassion and kindness for yourself . . . and for any being who feels small and weak and suffers . . .

It is important to understand that causes and conditions create feelings of weakness, of being outnumbered, defeated, etc. There is an impersonal logic to them . . . that can help make it feel less personal.

Interestingly, in terms of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment in Buddhism, investigation – like looking into the causes of feeling weak – is said to give rise to energy.

Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus.

Alexander Graham Bell

And here is a quote from William James, the father of American psychology:

Most people live, whether physically, intellectually or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into a habit of using and moving only his little finger. Great emergencies and crises show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed.