



YOUR BRAIN

Let's think of your brain as what it is, a live organism. Like all living things, It needs food to survive and thrive. To grow, change and evolve.

The food it needs is information, but not just any information, **it needs detailed differentiated information.**

You, Meg are the owner of your brain and the only one who can supply it with this information. The problem has been that **you have, in effect, been starving your brain.** NOT intentionally.

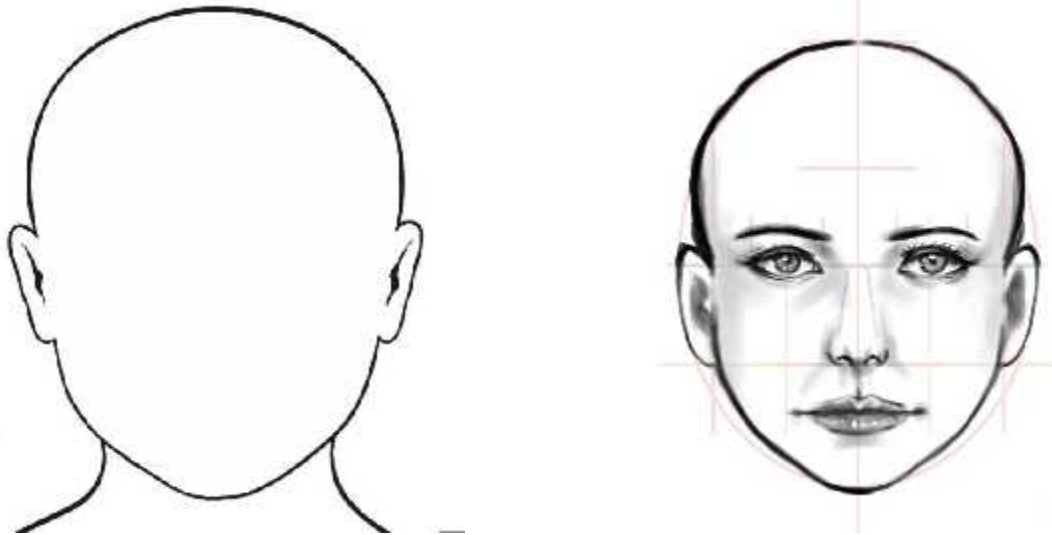
The lens of autism has been distorting, blurring or intensifying the information you take in, making it difficult for you to process it in a deliberate or careful way. Sometimes you even tune it out.

So your brain gets just enough food (information) to survive, but it is forced to swallow that food whole without digesting it. It cannot organize the information if it hasn't properly digested it.

The proper functioning of your body and mind depends on **YOU being FULLY AWARE of DIFFERENCES in the information you take in.**

Let me explain. All of your senses, but particularly sight, hearing and touch, are vital sources of information. If you look at someone, like Uncle Paul, and do not

notice the details of his appearance, you are denying your brain the food it needs to function. If you just see his skin and hair, your brain will always just notice skin and hair. That is the pattern you have programmed into it.



YOU have imposed this limitation on your brain by not noticing other facial features, by not feeding it the information it needs to make sense of a face as a whole entity. And, building upon this information, to make sense of all sorts of facial expressions.

The fewer pieces of information you give your brain to work with, the less it is able to do. It is even more limited when those pieces of information are taken in whole, are large and chunky (unfiltered).

The more small bits of detailed information you feed your brain, the more your brain can do for you. Because it can take those bits and re-arrange them in all sorts of clever and ingenious ways.

That is why noticing differences and details so important. You are providing your brain with lots of bits and pieces to work with.

EXAMPLE:

- 4 pieces of paper vs. 100 puff balls (arrange into different shapes)

Meg, you've said you can't FEEL various parts of your body. This makes coordinating and carrying out movement with precision and dexterity very difficult for YOU. **But the problem is that you have not given your brain the precise information it needs to work with.**

Basically, you cannot FEEL your body because you have not FELT your body. You have not fully differentiated your various body parts.

You need to notice, really notice and feel each and every part of your body. You need to isolate each finger and toe as separate entities (thing one, thing two) and feed that precise information to your brain.

It can then organize all these vital bits of information into a precise mental map of your body that YOU can rely on kind of like a GPS. You will no longer have to work so hard to do the simplest things. The GPS system in your brain will guide you smoothly to where ever you want to go.

EXERCISES:

- Draw various lines (longer-shorter) and shapes on paper and have Meg differentiate the details. Become ever more subtle in the differences.
- Draw dot, straight line and wiggly line on different parts of Meg's body.
- Have her shrug her shoulders, arch her back, turn her head back and forth
- Have her move her arms up over her head, out in front of her etc.
- Work on hand-eye coordination. Have Meg trace lines and letters with her finger. Have her follow/point to object on the end of a backscratcher..

You NEED to be brave, Meaghan, and dare to FEEL. You need to open your eyes to the world around you and begin to **not just ATTEND TO what you see but NOTICE subtle differences in what you experience.**

Each time you allow yourself to really FEEL what your senses are taking in, to appreciate the details and differences of the images that you see and the sounds that you hear, you are feeding your brain the vital information it needs to grow, to organize itself out of the chaos of autism.

This FEELING of what is happening is at the core of everything we do; it is at the heart of our ability to think and move.

You say your body doesn't listen to your mind. But your BRAIN is in charge of BOTH your body and your mind, and YOU, Meg, are in charge of your BRAIN.

You need to STOP listening to the brain you have now, that is made up of a few old, frayed wires that are clearly messing with your mind and body. And you have to **START creating a new, re-modeled version of your brain.**

This sounds like a huge task, but it really isn't if we break it down to essentials.

First and foremost, you need to **pay attention to everything you do**. Science has shown a clear correlation between the power of attention and the brain's ability to change itself.

When you tune out rather than tuning in, you are only reinforcing the autistic state of your brain. The state that is causing you to perseverate or repeat nonsense rather than learning to talk properly BECAUSE you are not giving your brain any NEW and different information to work with.

Learning to attend is not going to be easy for you because you have spent years operating on autopilot, but YOU can make it easier by **SLOWING EVERYTHING DOWN**.

Part of the reason your brain defaults to its already existing automatic patterns, is that **you are doing everything TOO FAST**.

Fast you can only do what you are already doing! This is why you repeat, why you use rote language for instant answers to familiar questions. You bypass the thinking process because **thinking takes time**.

Coming up with the right words to say and then planning how to say them takes time. You don't give yourself time. You speak as if you are in a race to get the words out because **YOU do not PAY ATTENTION to what you are saying**.

You need to SLOW WAY DOWN when it comes to thinking about and uttering words. Give your brain time the time it needs to understand your thoughts and translate them into the proper language.

Same thing with typing. You make mistakes when you go to hit the keys on the keyboard because your arm is moving too fast for you to differentiate the letters. When you move too fast all you get is gibberish.

When you slow down, you can begin to feel your arm in motion and that feeling sends signals to your brain that it can work with.

Skill building takes time and it MUST be done SLOWLY.

Before a skill can be there, millions of new neural connections need to be created and integrated in the brain. And in order for these connections to form, you need to do your part by attending to your body and noticing differences in how you move and in what you experience as a result of that movement.

If you are going to gain true typing independence, Meg, we need to slow the process way down, to give you maximum opportunity to FEEL, to give your brain the time it needs to differentiate and integrate your typing skill into its playbook.

Because right now, your skill is only half-way programmed in. The movements you make are flip-flopping between **automatic** and **purposeful**.

Automatic or impulsive movement occurs when you act without thinking.

Purposeful movement occurs when you are attentive to or mindful of exactly what you are doing.

Movement done automatically creates no new connections in your brain, it just ridges in deeper pre-existing, old brain patterns - reinforcing your limitations.

Meg, you are right when you call your repetitions and perseverations "nonsense talk." But actually, it is more devastating than that. It is actually "brain killing" talk. **Every time you utter a rote word or phrase, you are starving your new brain of the food it needs to help you communicate in a meaningful way.**

I know how your inability to communicate what you really want to say frustrates you. It makes you angry and upset. Unfortunately, these emotions further undermine your desire to learn and express yourself.

See, Meg, the movements you make aren't just physical, involving your body. They involve your thoughts and emotions as well.

Emotions trigger the release of chemicals in the brain called neuromodulators. Neuromodulators increase or decrease the level of arousal or interest in your brain, depending on what you are feeling. You might say they can turn on or turn off your "learning switch."

If you are feeling frustrated, stressed, angry or anxious, the neuromodulators in your brain decrease its ability to pay attention to what you are learning. You revert to automatic, pre-programmed movements.

However, if you are feeling good, safe, happy, comfortable, accepted and loved, your brain is in high alert. It is wide open to gobble up and digest all the bits of information you can feed it.

When you make a whining noise, Meg, think about what emotion you are really trying to express. Are you really sad? Or are you just making the sound **automatically**, because it's deeply grooved into your old brain.

Are you even AWARE you are making this sound?

EXAMPLE:

Imitate Meg's whining sound. I am aware of the sound I am making.
I can make it louder. I can make it softer.

Have Meg imitate me making the sound louder and softer.

There you go, Meg, you are exerting some control over the sound you make. You can make it louder or you can make it softer. It is all up to you. But this is the first time you have fed your brain this important information.

Same thing goes for your repeating. You can repeat nonsense loudly or you can repeat it softly. You can even whisper nonsense. But however you say it, it is not going to do your new brain any good **UNLESS or UNTIL you take control and vary the way you say it.**

So, instead of saying "*blue scarf*," you might try "*blue scarf makes me barf*."

Granted, it isn't very appetizing, but your new brain will gobble it up because **at least it's original. You have used some variety in your wording.**

Instead of repeating "go home," you might say what you are really thinking, "I want to live at home." If you slow down your speech, you are fully capable of speaking these words. The problem is, the "go home" phrase is so deeply grooved into your old brain that it shoots out of your mouth impulsively.

Your old brain is not a reasoning brain. It is a hyper-responsive, impulsive brain. It will fight you tooth and nail in your efforts to SLOW DOWN and ATTEND TO the information you are getting from your senses. But, YOU, Meg, are smart enough to outwit it and gain mastery over it.

It won't happen overnight. **Just be aware.**

Every time you feel an impulse to say or do something you know is foolish or self defeating, know that it is your old brain taunting you. Those are the times you need to **redirect your mind to noticing some small detail around you.**

It doesn't matter what it is. It might be something you hear that you have never heard in the same way before. It might be the features on someone's face that you have never really seen before. It might be the way a particular fabric feels. **Any bit of sensory information you can FOCUS ON and FEEL will defeat your old brain.**

And each time you vanquish an impulse to repeat or stim, the pattern for that behavior becomes less grooved in. The more you resist, the more the grooves smooth out until they are gone entirely.



That is what we are aiming for, Meg. That is our ultimate goal.

YOU can do this Meg, **but you need to slow down and be aware.**

I know you have this capacity. You amaze me in your ability to zone in on toys you want where ever we are. That is external awareness. But I am talking as well about internal awareness, or self awareness, which you have evidenced as well in your insightful writings about how it feels to be autistic.

Self awareness, this ability to be an inner observer of our own thoughts, actions and behavior, is a source of freedom. It elevates you to a place of discovery and choice rather than always having to be reactive and rely on rote responses.

Awareness is the opposite of Autism.

When you are being autistic, you are operating on autopilot. You have no awareness of what you are doing or how that behavior is affecting others.

When you are self aware, you can step outside the confines of your autism and know that there is no limit to where your own inner genius can take you.

And that inner genius of yours has been lurking in the shadows far too long, Meg. It is high time you revealed to the world what you have already shown Dad and I -- your remarkable intelligence, humor, insight, caring, compassion, love and empathy.

I know you have ambitions and dreams, Meaghan and there is no reason why you should not attain each and every one of them.

Here is a big secret. I know that you are not getting as much opportunity to type independently as you would like, but that should not stop you from practicing.

The thing is, you can always practice in your imagination.

Did you know that practicing a skill in your mind can improve it as much as 50%. It's true. That's why they say, **if you can dream it, you can do it.**

The wonderful thing about being human, Meg, is that we can imagine or dream anything we want. In our minds, we can be whoever we want and we can do whatever we want. There are no limitations.

Your brain upgrades itself to its highest level of functioning when you let yourself think beyond the here and now. There are no impossibilities.

You may surprise yourself with what your brain comes up with when you feed it some of your amazing thoughts. I bet the future holds some pretty remarkable solutions for overcoming lots more than your current challenges.

As Einstein said: *Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.*

Don't doubt yourself, Meg. Be inspired by the examples of others who have persevered and triumphed, like Stephen Hawking and Helen Keller.

ALS left Hawking with no body movement at all with the exception of one cheek muscle, and yet he was recognized as one of the world's most brilliant and creative physicists. Helen Keller was blind and deaf and yet she didn't let this stop her from getting a PHD and becoming a respected, published author.

In the words of Temple Grandin: *"The potential for genius may be quietly hiding inside anyone, just waiting for an opportunity to express itself."*

The opportunity is now for you, Meg!