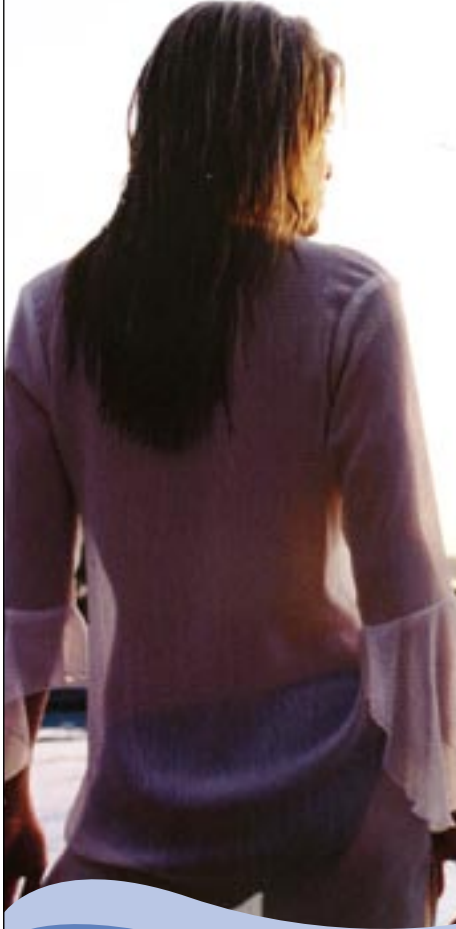




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Feeding The Ravenous Brain

By Charles Larsen

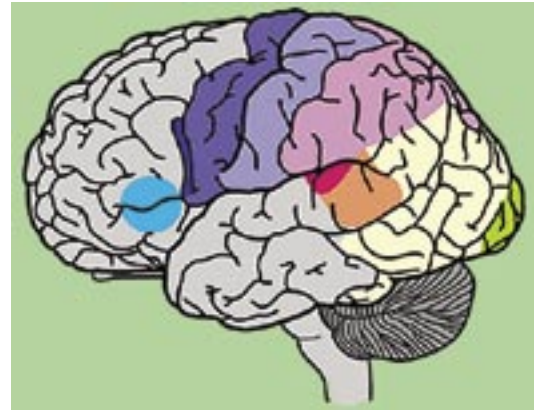
The expression feeding the brain, as used in this essay, will be defined as those mental tasks that all humans can do to nurture their mental processes. We shall attempt to artificially divide it into the psychological, the intellectual, and the spiritual; all of which overlap and impact upon each other in many ways. We will address the psychological and intellectual this month and the spiritual in July.

The very act of writing this essay is brain food. It requires reading source materials, cogitating, and then the neurological processes leading to fingers typing on the word processor. How could the psychological affect this process? Obsessive-compulsive mentation could result in a lack of the ability to decide what to write and how to write it. One suffering from bipolar disorder in manic phase might complete it in ten minutes, and depending upon the severity of the disorder, the essay might offer brilliant insights or be incomprehensible. One's spirituality could result in guilt, discomfort, or shame when exploring the notion of brain food. Or, it could result in a relaxed and tranquil approach to the task.

THE MENTAL MEAL

Perhaps a good place to begin is prior to the mental meal. The brain is hungry. It is always ravenous. People with learning disorders have hungry brains, but we are not as adept at offering them food as we are those who learn in more usual ways. To feed the brain in a hectic or unstable environment with many distractions is like trying to feed a two year old while other toddlers are dashing about and making noise. Not easy. What, one might ask, about various computer games – they are hyperkinetic and yet stimulate neural pathways to enhance hand-eye coordination. Not being aware of all the studies done to determine long-term effects, one might suggest that limited time is devoted to such activities.

Much research has been done to understand those with impaired neural pathways due to dementia or brain trauma, and there is some limited evidence that virtual activities



may enhance the mood of those affected. Perhaps the mood enhancement contributes to the enhancement of the brain's digestive system. As with our gastrointestinal tract, the reduction of anxiety leads to an elevated ability to learn and remember. When you were a child and had to recite in front of the class – did not anxiety impair your ability to remember, or, minimally, your smooth delivery of the material? For most children, anxiety is the enemy of recalling material digested by the brain. We all recall some classmates who, throughout our educational experiences, seemed to exhibit no anxiety when standing and delivering, be it a memorized poem, an anecdote, or their own opinions and assessments. A tendency toward exhibitionism? Who knows? Food for thought.

INTELLECTUAL EXERCISES

However, it is known that reading, keeping track of and following one's daily schedule, keep the brain (mind) organized and open to new stimuli which are age compatible. These are among the intellectual activities that keep the brain from shriveling up and becoming less adept. Puzzles of all sorts are helpful in this endeavor. The most invigorating kinds of thinking may involve challenges to cherished ideas and beliefs.



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