

INTRODUCTION

The Brain Warrior's Way



A warrior is someone who is committed to master oneself at all levels, who develops the courage to do the right thing for yourself, others, and community.

—THE WAY OF THE SEAL BY MARK DIVINE

THE WAR FOR YOUR HEALTH is won or lost between your ears, in the moment-by-moment decisions your brain makes every day. When your brain works right your decisions are much more likely to be effective and add laserlike focus, energy, and health to your life. When your brain is troubled, for whatever reason, you are much more likely to make bad decisions that steal your energy, focus, moods, memory, and health and lead to your early destruction and trouble in future generations.

Bushido (Japanese: “way of the warrior”) is the code of ethics for the samurai. It is a way of living that is required to be a warrior. Samurais ascribe to a culture focused on constant, never-ending self-improvement in an effort to protect themselves and those they love. The Brain Warrior's Way is also a way of living, a clear path we have developed over three decades of helping tens of thousands of patients at Amen Clinics have better brains and better lives. In addition, we have used this path to help people in the military, businesses, churches, schools, and drug rehabilitation centers. Living the Brain Warrior's Way will improve your decision-making ability and sense of personal power and help your

- Energy
- Focus
- Moods
- Memory
- Weight
- Relationships
- Work
- Overall health

The Brain Warrior's Way is a unique and powerful program and the only one of its kind to improve the health of your brain and body. It is grounded in scientific research and designed to help you live with vitality, a clear mind and excellent health—even if you are struggling or are in pain right now—even if you've made unhealthy choices for many years. This program will help you turn your health around. Don't you want to wake up feeling good inside and out every day?

By following the Brain Warrior's Way, you will transform the health of not just your brain and body, but the brains and bodies of those you love and care for. The new science of epigenetics has taught us that your habits turn on or off certain genes that make illnesses and early death more or less likely in you, and also in your children and grandchildren. The war for the health of your brain and body is not just about you. It is about generations of you.

Step by step, this book will show you how to develop a Brain Warrior's MASTERY over your physical and mental health. It will teach you:

Mind-set of a Brain Warrior—knowing your motivation to be healthy and focusing on abundance, never deprivation

Assessment of a Brain Warrior—having a clear strategy, brain health assessment, knowing and optimizing your important numbers, fighting the war on multiple fronts, and always being on the lookout to prevent future trouble

Sustenance of a Brain Warrior—knowing the food and supplements that fuel success and give you a competitive edge

Training of a Brain Warrior—engaging in the daily habits and routines that protect your health

Essence of a Brain Warrior—transforming your pain into passion and knowing why the world is a better place because you are here

Responsibilities of a Brain Warrior—taking the critical step of sharing information and creating your own tribe of Brain Warriors

Yearlong Basic Training of a Brain Warrior—making lasting changes with tools that will last a lifetime

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: BRAIN WARRIORS ARE

- Serious
- Purposeful
- Informed
- Aware
- Prepared
- Nourished
- Highly trained
- Deeply honest
- Passionate
- Protective
- Relentless

Along the way you will meet dozens of triumphant Brain Warriors who were once prisoners of the war for their health. Their stories will inspire and encourage you into a new way of living.



BRAIN WARRIOR BILL

Here is a note from the leader of an East Coast Young Presidents' Organization (YPO) Pod whose group spent three days with us at Amen Clinics learning the principles of the Brain Warrior's Way.

"The program dramatically changed my life, allowing me to lose weight, and to focus unlike I could ever remember. My depression faded away and my focus and productivity improved. As a group, we universally agreed that the visit to Amen Clinics had the greatest impact on our lives in over a decade of being together."

Most people don't want to think about wars and warriors, and we would prefer not to either, but if you open your eyes and tell yourself the truth about what is happening in our society it is painfully obvious: we are in a war for the health of our brains and bodies. Americans die younger and experience more illness than people in other wealthy nations, despite spending nearly twice as much on health care per person.¹ Close to 75 percent of our health-care dollars are spent on chronic *preventable* illnesses, including Alzheimer's disease, depression, ADD/ADHD, diabetes and prediabetes, and obesity.

WHY WE ARE IN A WAR FOR OUR HEALTH

And this is not just an adult war. Huge corporations are targeting your children and grandchildren. When a clown or a king with a billion-dollar bankroll can come into your living room and bribe your children with toys to get them to eat low-quality, nonnutritious foods that promote illness and early death it's time to fight back. According to a recent study, the toys fast-food companies use to entice children are highly effective weapons in hooking their developing brains to want more of what will hurt their health.² In addition, well-meaning organizations, such as the Girl Scouts, enlist young girls to sell unhealthy cookies as a way to fund their activities, and few people think twice about the sugar, vegetable oil, partially hydrogenated fats, and artificial preservatives that promote disease.

You are in a war for your health. Nearly everywhere you go (schools, work, shopping malls, movie theaters, airports, ball parks, and so on), someone is trying to sell you food that will kill you early. The standard American diet (SAD) is filled with pro-inflammatory foods that increase your risk for diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, ADHD, depression, and dementia.³ It is also associated with a smaller hippocampus, one of the major memory structures in the brain.⁴

The real weapons of mass destruction in our society are foods that are

- Highly processed
- Pesticide sprayed
- Artificially colored and sweetened
- High glycemic
- Low fiber
- Foodlike substances
- Laden with hormones
- Tainted with antibiotics



Plus the companies that produce these unhealthful foods not only use toys to hook tiny human brains but also use neuroscience tricks to hijack adult brains. They purposefully associate gorgeous, scantily clad women with poor-quality food to hook your pleasure centers, somehow getting you to make the illogical connection that if you eat those foods, either these women will want you or you will look like them. You must know there's no way these beautiful women would look the way they do if their diet regularly consisted of cheeseburgers that dripped mayonnaise, mustard, and ketchup down their blouses.

In addition, many corporations brag about the addictive nature of their foods, "Bet you can't eat just one." They hire food scientists to combine fat, sugar, and salt with the perfect texture, crunchiness, meltiness, and aroma to overwhelm the brain with flavor to trigger the "bliss point" in your brain, which is akin to taking a hit of cocaine, making you literally fall in love with low-quality foods. This is one of the reasons people say they love candy, doughnuts, pastries, french fries, and bread and can't ever conceive of giving them up. They are not eating to live; they are eating to feed addictions that were artificially created for a profit motive. We had one woman tell us she would rather get cancer than give up sugar. We wondered aloud if she dated the bad boys in high school. Being in love with something that hurts you is a position that needs some serious reexamination.

No food of any kind belongs in the same emotional place in your brain as the love you have for your spouse, children, or grandchildren. Many ancient warriors considered dependence on anything, especially food, a weakness, and totally unacceptable. They ate to win; their survival depended on it. We want you to do the same thing if you truly love yourself, your health, your loved ones, and future generations.

The war for your health is not just about our modern-day adulterated food. News outlets repeatedly pour toxic thoughts into our brains, making us see terror or disaster around every corner to boost their ratings. The constant frightening images activate our brains' primitive fear circuits (amygdala) that once ensured our survival but are now obsolete. The news always highlights the sensational, evil, and most awful stories to keep you hooked to their channels or websites. Unless you purposefully monitor your news intake, these companies succeed in raising your stress hormones, which over time shrink the major memory centers in your brain and put excessive fat around your waist—and belly fat is particularly toxic, because it converts healthy testosterone

into unhealthy, cancer-promoting forms of estrogen. Do you reach for your phone first thing in the morning to see what awful things have happened in the world overnight? You might not have known that this habit is adversely affecting your health, but now you do.

You are in a war for your health. It is further fueled by technology companies that are constantly creating addictive gadgets that hook our attention and distract us from meaningful relationships.⁵ Many people are on their phones at mealtimes, rather than interacting with family members. A 2015 study found that teens actually spend more time on social media (average 9 hours) than they do asleep. Tweens are online 6 hours a day.⁶ Technology has hijacked developing brains with potentially serious consequences for many.

At Amen Clinics we have treated many teens and adults with video game or pornography addictions. One teenager became violent whenever his parents limited his play. We scanned his brain while he played video games and then later after he had abstained from playing any games for a month. It was like we were looking at the brains of two different people. The video games caused abnormal firing in his left temporal lobe, an area of the brain often associated with violence. When he was off video games, he was one of the sweetest, most polite young men we had met; but when on them, it was a completely different story.

Daniel did a Tinder experiment for the *Dr. Oz Show* using brain scans to see the effect of the dating site on mood and focus. He demonstrated that, in some individuals, the dating site can make people more vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

As video game and technology usage goes up, so do obesity and depression.⁷ Ian Bogost, famous video game designer (*Cow Clicker* and *Cruel 2 B Kind*) and chair of media studies and professor of interactive computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, calls the wave of new habit-forming technologies “the cigarettes of this century” and warns of their equally addictive and potentially destructive side effects.⁸

As part of the gadget revolution, disturbing new research from Microsoft reported that humans lose concentration after about 8 seconds, while the lowly goldfish loses its focus after about 9 seconds.⁹ It seems like evolution may be going in the wrong direction. In 2000, the human attention span average was estimated at 12 seconds, which is not great; but losing a third of our attention span in fifteen years is alarming!

According to an article in *Harvard Business Review*, “Beware of the Busy Manager,” our unhealthful lifestyles are diminishing our capacity

at work.¹⁰ Only 10 percent of managers score high in both focus and energy, two of the main ingredients for success. The authors found that 20 percent of managers were disengaged, 30 percent scored high in procrastination, and 40 percent were easily distracted. This means that 90 percent of managers, and likely the rest of us, lack focus and/or energy.

These and other assaults on our brains and bodies have potentially devastating long-term consequences.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR FOR OUR HEALTH

Genes play a more minor role than you might think, and many diseases are born out of unhealthful choices and behaviors, regardless of whether there is a genetic predisposition. Sadly, all around us we can see the devastating consequences of preventable illness.

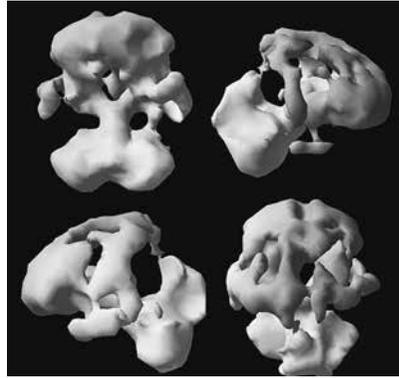
Alzheimer's disease is expected to triple by 2050, and there is no cure on the horizon. Alzheimer's disease affects 50 percent of people age eighty-five and older. If you are fortunate to live until you are eighty-five or beyond you have a one-in-two chance of losing your mind along the way. To make matters worse, recent brain-imaging research has demonstrated that Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia actually start in the brain decades before you have any symptoms. Below is a brain SPECT scan, which measures blood flow and activity, of a fifty-nine-year-old woman diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease compared to someone with a healthy brain. You can see the back half of her brain is deteriorating. She likely had trouble in her brain in her thirties or forties.

Premature cognitive impairment leads to diminished work performance, which can lead to hardships among a workforce that grows older every year. With people working longer than ever before, even minor drops in brain function can jeopardize your productivity and job security. Since the 2008 recession, the average retirement age has risen from age fifty-seven to age sixty-two and by 2020 it is estimated that 25 percent of American workers will be fifty-five or older. The exciting news is that new research suggests that you can decrease your risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia by 60 percent or more, and those same strategies will help your mood, focus, and memory. The Brain Warrior's Way will clearly lay out those strategies for you.

HEALTHY VERSUS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE



Healthy
Full, even, symmetrical activity



Alzheimer's
Decreased activity in back of brain

Depression is one of the greatest killers of our time. It affects 50 million Americans at some point in their lives and has increased 400 percent since 1987. Depression is associated with suicide, divorce, job failure, heart disease, obesity, and dementia. Depression doubles the risk of Alzheimer's disease in women and quadruples it in men. A staggering 23 percent of women between the ages of twenty and sixty are taking antidepressant medications. The risk of depression also significantly increases after the age of sixty-five.¹¹

Attention deficit disorder (ADD), also called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), is now being diagnosed more frequently than ever. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that nearly one in five high-school-age boys and 11 percent of school-age children overall have received a diagnosis of ADD, including an estimated 6.4 million children between the ages of six and seventeen. This is a 16 percent increase since 2007 and a 41 percent increase in the past decade.¹² This rapid rise of ADD is due to many factors, including low-fat, low-fiber, high-glycemic diets; increased use of electronics; decreased exercise; and diminished sleep. Many people underestimate the devastating consequences of ADD. Yet, when left untreated, it is associated with school underachievement and failure (35 percent never finish high school), drug and alcohol abuse (according to one study from Harvard, 52 percent of untreated ADD adults have a substance abuse problem), job failure, divorce, incarceration, obesity, depression, and dementia.

Diabetes or prediabetes now affects 50 percent of the U.S. population, according to a 2015 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical*

*Association.*¹³ Blood sugar problems have dramatically escalated in the last thirty years. In 1960, one out of a hundred people in America had type 2 diabetes; today that ratio has changed to one out of ten people, a tenfold increase. Since the 1980s, the rate of type 2 diabetes has gone up 700 percent.¹⁴ The standard American diet is likely to blame and the sad news is that a majority of these cases are preventable. Most people don't fully understand the devastating consequences of diabetes and even prediabetes, in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not yet high enough to qualify for a diagnosis of diabetes. High blood sugar levels damage blood vessels, inhibit healing, and damage every organ in the body. We have both lost loved ones with diabetes who had limbs amputated and suffered from depression, dementia, heart disease, and blindness.

Obesity is a serious national crisis with two-thirds of Americans overweight and one-third obese. Obesity increases inflammation, which is a low-level fire in the body that destroys our organs and is a risk factor for more than thirty medical illnesses, including cancer, diabetes, depression, and dementia. There are many published studies, including two by the research team at Amen Clinics, that report as your weight goes up, the size and function of your brain go down. This is the biggest brain drain in U.S. history and is now a national security crisis. Around 75 percent of young applicants for the military are rejected. The Department of Defense stated, "Being overweight or obese turns out to be the leading medical reason why applicants fail to qualify for military service. Today, otherwise excellent recruit prospects, some of them with generations of sterling military service in their family history, are being turned away because they are just too overweight."

Our national weight problem is not just an adult issue. Childhood obesity has increased from 4 percent in 1982 to 18.5 percent in 2015, a 350 percent increase. And it is very clear that the food scientists and fast-food companies are going after your kids. If you are not a warrior for the health of your brain and the brains of those who depend on you, ADD, depression, dementia, premature aging, diabetes, obesity, and premature death are the consequences for your loved ones and yourself.

When we first came to understand the interrelatedness of these illnesses and implemented integrated treatment strategies, we were so excited with the outcome for our patients: better energy, focus, mood, memory, weight, and even pain relief.

Initially, when we started to talk about the Brain Warrior's Way, some people pushed back, saying, "But I don't want to fight—being a Brain



The answer to these epidemic problems is not to see them as separate disorders with their own unique treatments, but rather as different expressions of the same unhealthy lifestyle that have exactly the same cure.

*In other words, there are many ways to become sick, but there is one clear path to wellness, and it's simpler than you think:
It is the Brain Warrior's Way.*



Warrior sounds hard.” Our response was and still is, “Being sick is hard. Being a Brain Warrior is easy once you understand and implement the principles.” Having your health, with better energy, memory, mood, and focus, is priceless. More than anything, being a Brain Warrior is an incredible mind shift with lifelong benefits—and you will never want to go back to bad habits and poor choices for your health.

We recently gave a presentation to the eighteen-member executive team of a multibillion-dollar technology company. At the end of the first morning, the CEO pulled Daniel aside and said he had to plant brain health in his company. “It could be our competitive advantage,” he said, “especially when we are competing for talent with the likes of Google, IBM, and Microsoft.” Just as it is for them, brain health is your competitive advantage in life. It will help you thrive in every aspect of your personal life, health, work, finances, and relationships.



*There is a proverb in martial arts,
“Master, why do you teach me to fight, but
speak of peace?”
The master replies,
“It is better to be a warrior in a garden,
than a gardener in a war.”*



If you are a lover or a healer and not a fighter, like Daniel, then harness the healing power by becoming a peaceful Brain Warrior. The most effective warriors in human history never picked up a physical weapon. Think of Jesus, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr., all of whom inspired massive numbers of people to work for just causes and changed history forever. Their fights were personal and principle centered and were won with their brains, not their brawn, which is exactly what we will show you how to do.

If you are a fighter like Tana, who has black belts in both Tae Kwon Do and Kenpo, this book will make perfect sense to you, too. Tana has been through a war with her health and never wants to go through it

again. As her sensei Bob White says, “If you are prepared for the worst, you can expect the best.” For her, martial arts is symbolic of overcoming barriers and never giving up.

DANIEL AND TANA’S BRAIN WARRIOR PATHS

The Brain Warrior’s Way is deeply personal for both of us. We love our mission of creating and leading the Brain Warrior community of people who are serious about the health of their bodies and brains. Here is a brief summary of our individual journeys, so you can understand why this movement is important to us.

DANIEL’S BRAIN WARRIOR PATH

The warrior mind-set has been with me since 1972 when I enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of eighteen to become an infantry medic. Working with wounded soldiers was where my love of medicine was born. As a medic, I was a warrior servant and loved supporting the health of our fighting men and women. After about a year, I realized that as much as I loved the medical aspects of being a medic I really hated sleeping in the mud and being shot at, so I got myself retrained as an X-ray technician and developed a passion for medical imaging. As our professors used to say, “How do you know unless you look?”

In 1979, when I was a second-year medical student, someone I cared about deeply tried to kill herself, and I took her to see a wonderful psychiatrist. I came to realize that if he helped her, which he did, it would not only save her life, but it could also help her children, and even her future grandchildren, as they would be shaped by someone who was happier and more stable. I fell in love with psychiatry because I realized it has the potential to change generations of people.

Since deciding to become a psychiatrist, I have been at war nearly every day fighting for the mental health and brain health of my patients. I fight with them for their sanity, marriages, children, grandchildren, and jobs as well as their will to survive and thrive. In my work, I have been at war taking care of children, teenagers, and adults who have been suicidal, homicidal, scarred by trauma, psychotic, depressed, manic, panicked, addicted, and demented.

The journey to becoming a dedicated Brain Warrior began in earnest

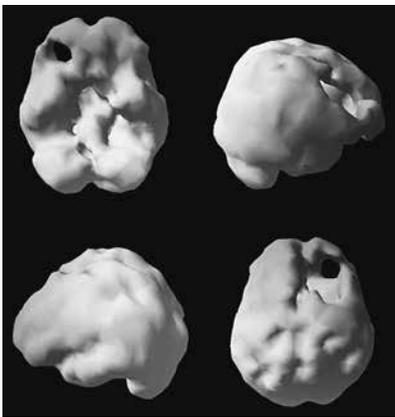
in 1991 when I attended my first lecture on brain SPECT imaging. SPECT stands for single photon emission computed tomography, a nuclear medicine study that looks at blood flow and activity in three-dimensional maps. SPECT was presented as a tool that could give psychiatrists more information to help their patients. In that one lecture, my two professional loves, medical imaging and psychiatry, came together and, quite honestly, revolutionized my life. Over the next twenty-five years my colleagues and I at Amen Clinics would build the world's largest database of brain scans related to behavior, totaling more than 125,000 scans of patients from 111 countries.

SPECT basically tells us three things about brain function: good activity, too little activity, and too much activity. Below are scans of people with traumatic brain injury and drug abuse. The images taught us many important lessons we will share with you in this book, such as how playing football, drinking too much alcohol, and using illicit drugs damage your brain and your life.

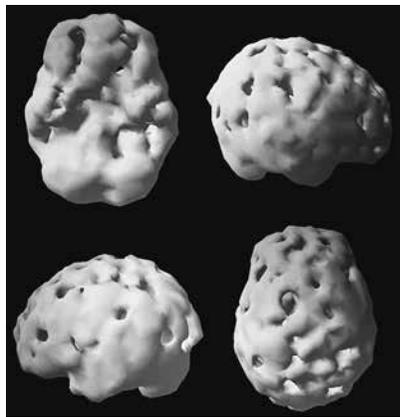
You've heard it said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but a map is worth a thousand pictures. A map tells you where you are and gives you directions on how to get to where you want to go. That is what SPECT imaging does for us at Amen Clinics. It gives us a map to help us better diagnose and treat our patients.

One of the first lessons the scans taught me was that "brain envy" is the real secret to happiness and longevity. When I first started to order scans I was so excited about the technology, I scanned many people I

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND DRUG ABUSE

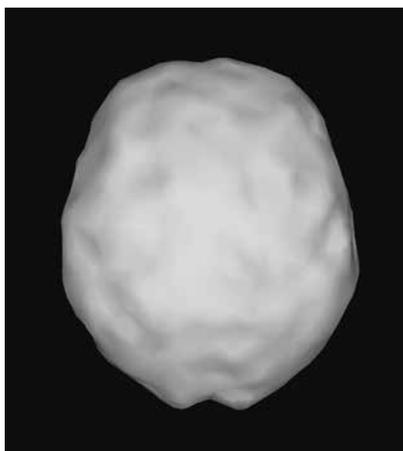


Low activity in the right frontal lobe from a traumatic brain injury



Holes indicate overall low activity, consistent with toxic effects of addiction

MY MOTHER'S BEAUTIFUL SPECT SCAN AT AGE SIXTY



Full, even, symmetrical, healthy appearance

knew, from a friend who had bad temper problems, to a cousin with a panic disorder, to my sixty-year-old mother, who happened to have a stunningly beautiful brain, which reflected her loving, amazing life.

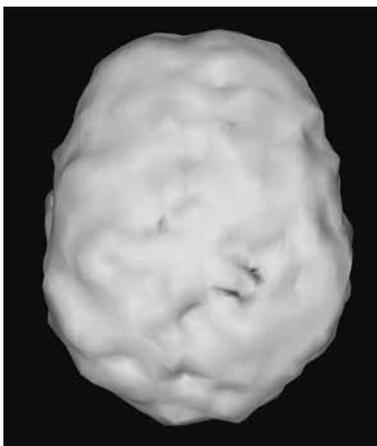
I was thirty-seven the first time I was scanned, and my brain was not healthy. I played football in high school, contracted meningitis as a young soldier, and had many bad brain habits. I didn't sleep much, was chronically stressed, and carried an extra thirty pounds. Seeing my brain caused me to develop brain envy and really care about it. Besides, how could my sixty-year-old mother have a younger-looking brain than I did? That was really irritating. The Brain Warrior's Way program we are going to give you in this book is the same one I initially developed for myself and for our patients. Now, twenty-five years later, my brain looks younger and healthier, which is not usually what happens as we get older. Typically, brains become less and less active over time, but now we know it doesn't have to be that way. We've discovered that with the right strategies brain aging is optional.



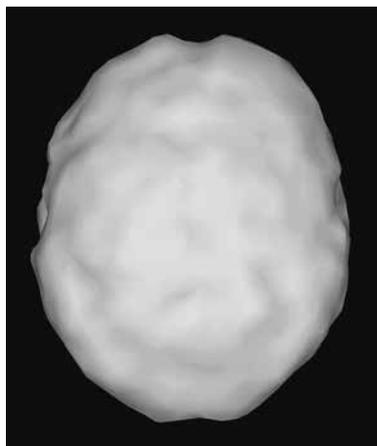
*The health of your brain is much more about
your actions than your age.*



DANIEL BEFORE AND DANIEL TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER



Bumpy, toxic appearance



Much healthier

TANA'S BRAIN WARRIOR PATH: YOUR HISTORY IS NOT YOUR DESTINY

The word *victim* conjures different emotions for everyone. I find it repulsive. It's personal. People who know me often describe me as an “ass kicker.” It's true. I'm an ass kicker, a loving ass kicker, but an ass kicker nonetheless. My ass-kicking abilities were born of necessity. It would be fair to say *I did not* grow up in the All-American-Dream situation. In fact, reality television had nothing on my family. I was a little girl who grew up with a lot of trauma and drama. I still remember the day when I was four years old and saw my mother and grandmother falling to the floor sobbing in grief when they discovered that my uncle had been murdered in a drug deal gone wrong.

We were poor, so as a latch-key kid I soothed my anxiety with my best friends: the leprechaun (Lucky Charms), the captain (Cap'n Crunch), and the tiger (Frosted Flakes). The chronic stress in my house paired with the poor-quality food attacked my immune system. I was sick a lot and became a frequent flyer at the hospital. I earned my miles the hard way, but being in the hospital so frequently gave me the desire to help others who were sick.

When I was seven years old, my grandmother came to live with us because her diabetes had become unmanageable. It wasn't so that she could take care of me, but rather so I could help take care of her. By the time I was eleven, I had to inject her with insulin, because she had gone

legally blind from the diabetes. My mother wasn't home to do it because she was working several jobs to make ends meet. I was terrified when the teaching nurse gave me an orange to practice on, telling me that if I gave my grandmother the wrong dose I could kill her.

The decision to learn how to fight, really fight, stems from a very personal traumatic experience. One day while walking to school at age fifteen, I was attacked by a large man. He clawed and grabbed very personal parts of my body as he overpowered me, pushing me toward the bushes in the nearby alley. Oddly, it didn't occur to me to be scared at the time, which ultimately may have saved my life. This psychopath in a suit was planning on raping me. Righteous indignation and fury were the only emotions coursing through my veins and gave me the fuel to scream, rip his shirt, slam my knee into his groin, and run . . . *fast!* Being overpowered is not a feeling you ever forget. Following the shock of that event, I felt terrified that any man could overpower me, simply because he was larger or stronger. Outrage quickly triumphed over terror. It took about a week before I resolved *never* to be a victim, or at least never act and feel like one. I taped a picture of Ms. Olympia to my mirror and began training to be strong, muscular, and agile. I wanted nothing to do with the image society was shoving down the throats of young women to be impossibly thin. I wanted to be a *warrior!*

What I never anticipated was the attack that came quietly eight years later, with no fanfare. Without warning a different kind of perpetrator knocked me flat on my back. It was a sucker punch I never saw coming. In fact it came from inside my own cells. I felt totally betrayed by my body when I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in my early twenties. It had metastasized into my lymph nodes and recurred multiple times. For the next eleven years, while my friends were graduating from college and getting married, I was undergoing surgeries and radiation treatments and was dealing with a multitude of other health issues that followed as a result. For the second time I knew what it felt like to be a victim and I *despised* it. I became so depressed I literally prayed that I would die. I thought, "If there is a God, He has given up on me."

At one point I was so sick I was on nine prescriptions and taking medications just to handle the side effects of some of the drugs. When I complained, the doctor told me it was genetic, that I was in denial, and said maybe I should see a psychiatrist! Let me be clear: that is *not* how I met Daniel! I was never a patient at the clinics, even though Daniel often says I'm a psychiatrist's dream.

When I was sick, I was fighting an invisible phantom, and I realized I was in for the fight of my life. It was *so much harder* to fight for my own health. I was never given explanations about how I would respond physically and emotionally to the medical treatments I was undergoing. No one explained that when my thyroid gland was removed and I was taken off of thyroid medication for two months to go through treatments, I would feel so horrible that I would wish I were dead. The depression enveloped me like a dark cloud, and I couldn't see the sun to save my life. All I knew was that I couldn't get out of bed, and I would rather be dead than go on wasting oxygen and being a burden to my family. That's when I became certain that God had abandoned me.

But God hadn't given up on me. Somehow, over time, I managed to summon every ounce of power in my being and, with God's help, I transformed my anger and fear into a positive energy that fueled a phoenix-like rise from the ashes of poor health. I went on to become a different kind of warrior. That's when I became my own best health advocate.

What does growing up in poverty, having chronic stress, and being assaulted have to do with being attacked by cancer? A lot; chronic stress attacked my immune system and made me vulnerable to illness. I had to fight back, which is how I found my Brain Warrior path and decided to help myself and others transform their brains and bodies. I became a trauma/neurosurgical ICU nurse, and I took care of the sickest patients in the hospital. I also became a martial artist because it made me feel empowered and gave me the mind-set of a warrior.

The wisdom I gleaned from martial arts was more than fighting, more than a sport, more than an art. Being a warrior is a *mind-set*. Being a Brain Warrior is putting these concepts into a brain health model. *Anyone* can have a Brain Warrior mind-set with a little training and a lot of focus. I want to be an example of strength, health, and fitness for my daughter and my patients. I quickly realized that my martial arts training and my warrior mind-set combined to form the perfect metaphor to help empower patients who have felt weak, depressed, sick, and victimized. My goal is to teach you the way of the Brain Warrior so you can get a black belt in health.

FAST-TRACK VERSUS INCREMENTAL APPROACH

In our experience, there are two major types of people seeking help:

1. Some are like Tana and have a natural warrior mind-set. They want to jump in with both feet to feel better as quickly as possible. They are the kind of people who say, “Just tell me what to do and I’ll do it all.” They are often sick or they have experienced a major health crisis. They are tired of feeling sick and tired.

2. Other people will take an incremental approach. They will do one thing at a time, then another, then another, and over time plant as many good habits into their life that seem to make sense and are easily doable. This is more consistent with Daniel’s path over the years.

Whichever path you choose, this program can help you. One of our most inspiring Brain Warriors, Nancy (whom you’ll meet in Part 4), took the incremental approach and within a year lost 70 pounds and completely transformed her life. Daniel’s father (you’ll meet him in Part 7), on the other hand, was very sick, and when he jumped in to become a Brain Warrior he did everything we told him to, including changing his diet, exercising regularly, managing his stress, and taking his vitamins and supplements, and he powerfully transformed his health in a much shorter period of time. It is up to you to choose the path that is best for you; either one can lead you to great success.

BRAIN WARRIORS ADVANCE IN STAGES: PRIMITIVE, MECHANICAL, SPONTANEOUS

Every martial artist, athlete, or musician remembers how awkward she felt when she first started learning complex moves. Most felt like their bodies would never cooperate. However, over time the moves became smoother, until they eventually felt like second nature. The brain and body needed time to grow, make new connections, and adapt to new ways of working and thinking.

When someone is first starting the Brain Warrior’s Way program she often feels a bit overwhelmed and confused.

- Hey, where’s the sugar?!
- Everything in moderation!

- What happened to the bread and pasta? When are they coming back?
- But I love french fries and sodas!
- I don't know where to shop or what to buy!
- I don't want to get 8 hours of sleep!
- I don't want to exercise!
- I'm too busy, too stressed, too used to my old ways.

We tell our Brain Warriors in training not to worry, because they are in the **primitive phase**, when things feel impossible and hard, and they think they'll never be able to do it. It just takes trust, a bit of knowledge, success in feeling better quickly, and persistence to get to the next stage. Pretty soon, often within thirty days if you are on the fast track or thirty to ninety days if you are taking a more incremental approach, your taste buds regenerate themselves, the brain makes new connections and begins to grow, and soon enough, everything becomes easier.

Then you will transition to the **mechanical phase**, when you develop a healthy rhythm. You find the foods you love, exercises you can do, and brain healthy habits come easier to you. Clarity and energy replace brain fog. You start associating certain foods with feeling happier and more energized or with feeling sadder and more lethargic. It starts to become much easier to make healthy choices. You become better at noticing your negative thought patterns and begin questioning the negative thoughts running through your head. In this phase you still have to closely follow the Brain Warrior's Way program, because it is not yet second nature to you. This phase may last for one to three months for the fast-track folks and three to six months for the incrementalists.

Our goal is for you to reach the **spontaneous phase**, when your habits and responses become automatic and second nature. This usually occurs between four and six months for the fast-track folks and six and twelve months for the people who are taking things step by step. And if you persist through your challenges and setbacks, such as job or work challenges, divorce and deaths (which we all experience), the Brain Warrior's Way will last a lifetime.

In the spontaneous phase, the responses and habits become automatic.

- Do you want dessert? Yes, but I want something that serves my health, rather than steals from it.

- Do you want bread before dinner? No.
- Would you like a second glass of wine? No.
- You schedule your workouts and rarely miss them, as you would rarely miss your child's sporting event or a doctor's appointment. They are important to you.
- You don't have to think about your responses because they are spontaneous and habitual in a good way.

Get your black belt in brain health. Being a black belt doesn't mean you are tougher or stronger or that you don't get scared. Being a black belt means you never give up, you face your fears, you persevere, and you *always* get up one more time!



*A black belt is just a white belt
who never quit.*



This gives you permission to fall without failing, as long as you get up and try again. It is a process. Most important, you pass on the information by becoming a mentor to someone who is struggling. To get your black belt you are expected to be a mentor, to teach others your art. By teaching others, you powerfully reinforce in yourself what you've learned. It truly is in the giving that we receive.

PRIMITIVE—MECHANICAL— SPONTANEOUS

Based on our experience, the most successful Brain Warriors go through the following three phases over the course of a year.

Months One to Three: The Primitive Phase

In the primitive phase, just follow the steps and do what we ask you to do; it won't feel natural, so it is important to follow the map or you will get lost.

- Recognize the war for your health and make a decision to change (Mind-Set, Part 1)
- Assess your brain to know your type and get your important health numbers (Assess, Part 2)
- Clean out your pantry, stock your kitchen with great food, start some simple supplements (Sustenance, Part 3)
- Start developing brain healthy routines around exercise and sleep (Training, Part 4)
- Begin to identify your essence, and ask yourself why you really want to be healthy and clarify your purpose (Essence, Part 5)
- Think about who needs you to be healthy and who you are responsible for now and in the future, and look for friends who can do the program with you (Responsibility, Part 6)
- Don't think of this as a quick fix; complete the 14-Day Brain Boost (Yearlong, Part 7)
- Plan on making many mistakes; expect it, but don't think of falling as failing. To move to the mechanical phase, it is essential to pay attention to mistakes and start learning from them.

Months Two to Six: The Mechanical Phase

The mechanical phase is when your confidence begins to grow. You have the sense you can do it, but you still need a mentor and help.

- Become more committed to being a Brain Warrior sheepdog for yourself and loved ones, after becoming aware of the toxicity and illness around you. You are focused on the abundance of health rather than being deprived of treats. Increased success leads to increased determination. You are better at ignoring or deflecting the criticism of others; it is bound to come from your unhealthy friends. (Mind-Set, Part 1)
- Know the lab values of your important health numbers and work to optimize them. You attack vulnerability to disease on multiple fronts (inflammation, blood sugar control, antioxidant support, nutrient loading). You know your risk factors of depression, accelerated aging, and Alzheimer's and are actively taking steps to prevent them. (Assess, Part 2)

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- Find multiple foods you love that also love you back. Your supplements are more targeted to your brain type. (Sustenance, Part 3)
- Expand your brain healthy routines to include simple meditation, deep relaxation, and learning to question the negative thoughts that try to steal your happiness. You feel a continual need to keep learning. Your routine becomes easier and more defined. (Training, Part 4)
- Start to discuss your past failures and painful moments with friends and family and see the meaning in prior suffering. (Essence, Part 5)
- Start to share this message with friends, coworkers, and loved ones. Your Brain Warrior tribe becomes a critical part of your life. (Responsibility, Part 6)
- Feel all in, not for a few months, but for the rest of your life. (Yearlong, Part 7)
- Begin to make fewer mistakes. There will still be bad days, but you are better at learning from them and quickly turning them around.

Months Six to Twelve: The Spontaneous Phase

Habits become routine in the spontaneous phase. You say to yourself, “I got this; it is not hard.” You naturally respond by doing the right things.

- Never think of giving up, even when you fall. You jump back into the game and start doing the right things again. You develop a sheepdog attitude and identify with being healthy. (Mind-Set, Part 1)
- Retest your important numbers to see your improvement. You’re more focused on long-term prevention strategies. (Assess, Part 2)
- Find new foods and recipes, as if on a treasure hunt. Your nutrition and supplement routine is consistent. You feel joyful in your food choices and realize eating poorly is depriving yourself of your health. (Sustenance, Part 3)
- Feel uncomfortable or irritated when you are out of your Brain Warrior routine—it feels better to do the right thing than to do

the wrong thing. New learning excites you as you feel more focused and cognitively sharper. (Training, Part 4)

- Be excited to help others; being healthy and sharing the Brain Warrior message becomes part of who you are because you have a secret that can change the world. (Essence, Part 5)
- Become motivated to mentor others, to share your success. (Responsibility, Part 6)
- Celebrate the process of becoming a Brain Warrior and feeling better and stronger for a lifetime. (Yearlong, Part 7)

IS THIS PROGRAM FOR YOU?

This program is for those who want to be serious about their health, either out of desire or necessity. It is for people who want to look and feel their best for as long as possible and for those who want to excel at work and school and in their relationships. It is also for people who struggle with problems such as:

Depression

ADHD

Anxiety disorders

Post-traumatic stress disorder

Addictions

Bipolar disorder

Traumatic brain injuries

Memory problems

Early dementia

Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia in their families

Obesity

Diabetes or prediabetes

Heart disease

Cancer

Cognitive effects of chemotherapy

The Brain Warrior's Way is also for the parents of children with disabilities and those taking care of elderly or impaired parents. It is for

those who want to build a legacy of health, rather than leave a legacy of illness; it's for those who want to be empowered; and it's for those who feel as if they were in a war for their health.

The Brain Warrior's Way is not for everyone. It is for people who want to change their brains and bodies for the rest of their lives. It is not for those looking for a quick fix, or cheat days, or wanting to take the month of December off. It is not for those who say "everything in moderation." Arsenic, cocaine, or having affairs in moderation can be very problematic. We are also not looking for people who have to be perfect. That is often an excuse to fail. We expect you will make mistakes and you will fall, just like toddlers fall when learning to walk, but Brain Warriors learn from their mistakes and make fewer and fewer of them over time.

We are recruiting and training Brain Warriors—people who are serious about the health of their brains and bodies, and the brains and bodies of those they love. Once you develop brain envy, a deep abiding love for the most precious organ in your body, you have the opportunity to become a Brain Warrior and everything changes for the good. The Brain Warrior's Way is a war cry to rally our families, businesses, schools, communities, and tribes to finally get and stay healthy. Join us.