**BEING BRAIN HEALTHY**

Media questions

What does it mean to be "brain healthy"?

Being brain healthy is an approach to living your life that puts wellness and quality of life front and center. Our brains are the command center for the body and they are both fueled and hindered by what we do each and every day. The really cool thing is that being brain healthy means turning up the noise on (amplifying) all those things that add color and richness to life. When we amplify an experience we become more in tune with the moment and all it encompasses – the whole sensory experience that is all around us – and we activate all those areas of the brain that process that information. Active brains are well-nourished brains and well-nourished brains help us thrive.

What qualifies you to write a book on being brain healthy?

I am a passionate student of all things related to the connection between how we act and how we think. I pour over every bit of research on the subject available and have incorporated pieces of much of that literature in this book. My singular focus is not just because my degrees are in psychology focused on cognitive functioning – they are – and the fact that I am fascinated by the power of the brain to heal itself – I am – but also because I lived it. I walked away from a life changing car accident and spent the next 18 month muddling my way through a brain injury that fundamentally changed how I thought. With some amazing guidance and support, I worked my way out of the fog of a brain injury. Being brain healthy is based on a way of life that moved me through my brain injury and now helps me live a better, richer, fuller, more colorful life every single day.

What inspired you to write the ***Being Brain Healthy***?

I don’t think I know anyone who is completely happy with how well they think and very few who are not worried about their aging brains. We lose our keys. We lose our thoughts. We forget what something is called. We can’t remember names. We have no idea why in the world we are in this room. ***Being Brain Healthy*** is about hope and working toward a better life. It is about taking small steps and rolling activities into our already packed lives or making small adjustments so we make the most of what is happening right now while we figure out strategies to improve those areas that need work. This lifestyle approach focuses on wellness and positive actions that help us work toward better thinking and better functioning. I wrote this book because I wanted to share what I learned on my road to recovery from brain injury and put all of that in the context of any kind of brain challenge – those associated with disease, treatments for disease, exhaustion, or age-related changes in thinking that force us to shift. I believe it is key to feel hopeful and take positive steps toward health and wellness because brain healthy is about making choices, shifting perspective, and consciously focusing on how the body works.

What are some common misconceptions people have about brain health?

There are two misconceptions about the brain that make me absolutely crazy. First, we are born with a certain number of brain cells and there is nothing we can do to make more. That is so wrong. We can absolutely encourage our bodies to grow new neurons and, beyond that, we can encourage our neurons to form new connections. Second, older brains don’t perform as well as younger brains. That too is untrue. Older brains may perform differently but definitely not worse.

How does brain health affect physical health?

The brain regulates all the body’s systems. It is the command center and point of all information processing so the connection between brain health and overall health is thoroughly linked. An emphasis on brain health is a focus on balance and finding the right mix of chemical and electrical activity to allow every system in the body to function at its optimal level.

In addition to TBI (traumatic brain injury), what conditions and diseases most affect brain health?

There are so many conditions and treatments for conditions that affect the brain health and cognitive functioning – some obvious and some much more subtle. In diseases that change brain structure like Parkinson’s Disease, Alzheimer’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, and stroke, thinking issues are often overlooked because medical practitioners are trained to look for physical impairments. The same holds true in case where thinking is changed by chemotherapy or anesthesia. Changes in the brain take many forms and often come bundled with other issues.

Other than physical damage to the brain due to injury or illness, what psychological or sociological factors might affect one's brain health?

The two biggest issues are stress and social isolation. Prolonged stress or periods of isolation – physical, psychological, or sociological –can change how your brain works and how well you adapt to future situations. Both of these conditions can re-wire your brain in the long run.

What is the No. 1 thing people should do daily to boost their brain health?

Smile. Your brain and your body are programmed to reward those things that make you feel good. Smiling is the fastest route to feeling good.

How might improved cognitive ability become clear to those instituting new brain healthy habits? What changes might first be apparent?

Initially, sifting and sorting through information and identifying what is important in each situation feels less overwhelming. That is huge. Big tasks are more easily broken down into components. Small items might become easier to group together. Receiving and processing information changes and life feels more even. When you find the right balance of chemical and electrical activity your body is cruising instead of fighting to find equilibrium. Take the struggle out of the equation and you clear the way for higher level thinking.

Who will benefit from reading ***Being Brain Healthy***?

The obvious answer is those who have suffered a TBI, those who have a condition that changes thinking, AND those who live with, work with, or care for those people. The truth is that we all have to pay attention to how we live or we will, without question, develop a condition that affects our brains. This book is both pro-active and re-active depending on your stage in life and health status.

What was your biggest challenge in writing ***Being Brain Healthy***?

This book got in my head a couple years ago and it was not letting go. I started out writing a much expanded version of my blog on brain health, brain healthy lifestyles, and that connection between how we act and how we think. It was good information with great practical, everyday applications but it was not relevant. After some persistent questions and urging from a dear friend’s husband (who is also a treasured friend but she came first), I got it that I had to tell the story of how I got here and to own the fact that the value of my journey was being lost – especially if I just kept it locked up in a safe in my head. There are moments in our lives that feel safer tucked deeply behind the curtain. I was afraid of again finding myself vulnerable and exposed, and that made me horribly uncomfortable. That piece, just like the practical pieces, became something I needed to get out. My accident and the 18 month journey out of the paper bag that was my life poured out and the rest made sense.

How did having TBI yourself affect you while writing ***Being Brain Healthy***?

I still “hit the wall” sooner than most and I can’t help that. I added writing this book to my already packed life so it probably took me longer than it would have had I not had a brain injury. I also see things differently than I did pre-accident and I am much more emotionally attached to things I feel strongly about like sharing what I learned and making the road easier for others. My writing was more intense and pointed in those areas where I felt the most pain – hoping that would help others.

What do you hope will be the biggest takeaway for readers of ***Being Brain Healthy?***

Life is better when you amplify your experience. Savor the moments, turn up the volume, and be powerful.