

Lesson 2 The Power of Good Habits

Wake Up Your Lazy Brain!

Host: Hello, everyone! Welcome to Science Report.

I'm your host, Alvin Stuart. We all know how important it is for us to exercise our bodies. But what about our brains? Did you know that it's important to work out your mind, too? Dr. Caitlin Yoon, a professor of neuroscience at Central University, is here with us today to talk about how we can become better thinkers. Thank you for joining us, Dr. Yoon!

Doctor: Thank you for having me.

Host: Doctor, what is the secret to becoming a better thinker?

Doctor: Well, I want to begin by asking the audience a question. Suppose you go into a store to purchase a notebook and a pen. The total price is \$1.10, and the notebook costs \$1 more than the pen. What is the price of the pen? Raise your hand if "\$0.10" was the first thing that came to mind.

Host: That's what popped into my head.

Doctor: The correct answer is "\$0.05." Now, think again. Do you see the error in your calculation? If the price of the pen was \$0.10, then the notebook would cost \$1.10. That would make the total price \$1.20.

Host: It seems like an easy question now.

Doctor: If you pause, take your time, and carefully think about it, you will realize your mistake. This simple question reveals the fundamental way that our brains work. They actually have two different systems that they can utilize: System 1 and System 2. System 1 is based on instinct, and it works without our conscious control. Our brains naturally apply this system in countless everyday situations, such as when we hear simple sentences, see large words on advertisements, or encounter easy questions like "2+2=?". This system works very quickly, because it needs to continuously process enormous amounts of information coming in through our senses. If you initially came up with the answer "\$0.10" to the question I asked earlier, that was the automatic response of System 1.

Host: That is fascinating! So if System 1 produces these rapid, automatic responses to situations we regularly encounter in daily life, what is the role of System 2?

Doctor: System 2 is responsible for our reasoning and deeper decision-making processes. Our brains use this system when we compare the prices and features of products, check the validity of an argument, or encounter difficult questions like "238×79×451=?". It controls conscious mental activities when we need to focus or make careful choices. However, while System 2 is more reliable, its application requires time and effort.

If you got the right answer to the notebook and pen question after taking a few seconds to reflect, then your brain used System 2 to check System 1's initial response. However, our brains tend to rely heavily on taking mental shortcuts with System 1. That is why it's common for people to answer the question incorrectly at first.

Host: So, Doctor, why do we rely on these mental shortcuts when System 1 is not as dependable as System 2?

Doctor: Well, we make about 35,000 decisions every day without realizing it, and it is impossible to make every one of these consciously. So it's quite reasonable and effective for the brain to be a bit lazy sometimes. Having a lazy brain allows us to save energy for critical tasks that require our focus and attention. However, it is dangerous when this becomes a habit. If your brain becomes too reliant on System 1, it will not be able to apply System 2 when you confront a problem that requires intense concentration. System 2 is essential for exercising human intelligence, so the less you use it, the more likely you are to become a lazy thinker. Those who have an overly lazy brain frequently make errors and bad decisions. They can also develop a habit of accepting things to be true even though they have never been proven. Therefore, it can be harmful to develop lazy brain habits.

Host: So how can we resist these lazy brain habits?

Doctor: We can make a deliberate effort to practice thinking deeply with System 2 more often. Here are some tips:

First, reconsider your initial thoughts instead of accepting them right away. Keep generating more ideas and carefully compare the available options before making a decision. Ask yourself if the information you have gathered supports your original conclusion. If not, then think again.

Next, make use of your natural curiosity. Curiosity can motivate us to investigate unfamiliar topics and ideas. It encourages us to dive deeper into a subject and explore it from multiple angles. Therefore, it can serve as a foundation for building deeper thinking habits.

Finally, learn something new in order to stimulate your brain and become more intelligent. Learning a language or a musical instrument might not be easy, but these new activities will create new paths that allow information to flow through your brain more efficiently.

Host: That sounds like excellent advice, Doctor. Do you have any final words for our audience?

Doctor: Yes. We are creatures of habit, so it is vitally important that we develop well-balanced thinking habits. We should remain alert so that we do not fall into the trap of making careless decisions. We should invest time into learning how to think deeply in order to use both System 1 and System 2 harmoniously. That way, instead of developing a habit of relying too much on a lazy brain, you can exercise your intelligence and reinforce your mental capabilities.

Host: Okay, Dr. Yoon. Thanks for the great advice! Please give her a big hand!