

STUDY GUIDE

FOUR SESSIONS



THE **DANIEL PLAN** **FIVE ESSENTIALS** SERIES

FOCUS

Essential Four

RENEWING YOUR MIND

featuring

DR. DANIEL AMEN
& DEE EASTMAN

Brain Health

"My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness."
Galatians 5:16 (MSG)

Did you know that our brains are a key component of a healthy lifestyle? Changing the way we eat and exercise requires changing the way we think about food, our bodies, and ourselves. Thinking is a function of our brains, and changing the way we think is easier when we know a few things about how our brains work. In this study on Focus, we'll learn how to get our thoughts right and discover what a transformative effect that can have on our health – in fact, on our whole life.

In addition, just as good thoughts profoundly affect our ability to eat right and get proper exercise, so also having a healthy brain is one of the main reasons to eat healthy food and get exercise. As we'll see in this first session, what we eat affects our risk of brain ailments such as Alzheimer's and even affects the clarity of our day-to-day decision making. Food is medicine for our bodies, and that's especially true for our brains.

Brain health and body health – they go hand in hand.

COMING TOGETHER

If this is your first time meeting together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourself.

Also, pass around a sheet of paper on which each person can write his or her name, address, phone number, and email address. Ask for a volunteer to type up the list and email it to everyone else this week.



Finally, you'll need some simple group guidelines that outline values and expectations. See the sample in the Appendix and make sure that everyone agrees with and understands those expectations.

When you're finished with these introductory activities, give everyone a chance to respond to this icebreaker question:

- » What you think matters to what you do and what results you experience. Share one thing you have been thinking about The Daniel Plan. It can be something positive, such as a good experience or a hopeful or encouraging belief. Or it can be a concern, a question, or a frustration. Just put it out there, whatever is on your mind.

LEARNING TOGETHER

AN INTERVIEW WITH **Dr. Daniel Amen**

Play the video segment for Session 1. As you watch, use the outline provided to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

- » Focus is about brain health and getting our thoughts right.

- » Our brain is the organ of judgment, personality, character, and every decision that we make. When our brain works right, we work right.

- » When our brain is troubled because of a head injury, improper eating, or any other reason, we have trouble in life. We are sadder, sicker, poorer. And we have trouble sticking with a healthy program.

- » We need to:
 - Care about our brain
 - Stop doing things that hurt our brain
 - Do things that help our brain



» Things we should stop:

- Drugs and alcohol
- Brain injuries in contact sports
- Obesity (as our weight goes up, our brain size and function go down)
- High blood sugar (as blood sugar goes up, brain function goes down)
- High blood pressure
- Untreated sleep apnea
- Untreated depression

- Untreated ADD
 - Negative thinking (if we think in negative terms, the part of our brain that makes decisions doesn't work as well)
 - Inflammation from foods like corn, soy, and sugar
- » The brain is only 2 percent of the body's weight, but it uses 20 to 30 percent of the calories we consume and 25 percent of the blood flow. To have good blood flow, we need healthy blood vessels. High blood sugar is associated with blood vessels becoming brittle and breaking.
- » Good things for the brain include:
- Aerobic exercise (it increases blood flow)
 - Coordination exercises (activities that take coordination – such as dance, table tennis, and juggling – connect new pathways in the brain)
 - High-quality protein
 - High-quality fat
 - Vegetables
 - Multi-vitamins
 - Vitamin D
 - Fish oil
 - Gratitude
 - Spending time with healthy people

- » Where we put our attention determines how we feel. We need to feed our brains with life-giving thoughts, including the truths of Scripture.
- » If we write down three things we are grateful for every day, it increases our sense of happiness.
- » When we give away good information about healthy living, we create our own support system and make it more likely we will stay on the program. Get it, learn it, and give it away.
- » There is no cure for Alzheimer's because it starts in a person's brain thirty to fifty years before they have symptoms. We prevent Alzheimer's by preventing the illnesses associated with it: obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, depression, sleep apnea.
- » You are not stuck with the brain you have. You can make it better.
- » Fifty-one percent of Americans will have a challenge with a psychiatric disorder sometime in their lives. Struggling with anxiety, depression, or another disorder is normal. Normal people have problems. The smart ones get help for their problems.

GROWING TOGETHER

Discuss what you learned from the video. Don't feel obliged to answer every question. Select those that most resonate with your group.

1

Why should we care about brain health?

2

Look at the list of things we should stop doing in the video notes. Which of those do you need to attend to? How might you go about that?

3

"Where we put our attention determines how we feel." How have you experienced this to be true? Think about where you've put your attention during the past day and how your mood has been affected.

"I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit."

Ephesians 3:16 (NLT)

4

Take a moment right now to write down three things you are grateful for.

*“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.”*

Psalm 100:4

5

What can you do to fill your attention with the truths of Scripture? (See the article “Biblical Meditation” in the Appendix.)

6

Half of all Americans will struggle with a psychiatric disorder such as depression or anxiety at some time in their lives. How is it helpful for you to know that it’s normal to have these struggles? What do you think is an appropriate way to respond to someone we know who has one of these disorders? What do you think we should do if we ourselves struggle with one of these disorders?

*“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity,
but of power, love, and self-discipline.”*

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)



Why is it important to know that we are not stuck with the brains we have? How does it affect you personally to know that?

What I Want to Remember

Complete this activity on your own.

- » Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took. Review also any notes from the discussion.
- » In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained from this session – from the video or the discussion. You can share it with the group if you wish.

BETTER TOGETHER

Now that you've talked about some great ideas, let's get practical—and put what you're learning into action. The Daniel Plan centers around five essential areas of health. In this study you're exploring Focus, so you can begin by identifying one or two steps you can take for a healthier brain. Then check out the Food Tip of the Week and the Fitness Move of the Week for some fresh ideas to enrich your journey toward health in those areas. There are also many tips and tools on the danielplan.com website so you can keep growing in all of the Essentials while doing this study. Use or adapt whatever is helpful to you!



FOCUS

Next Steps

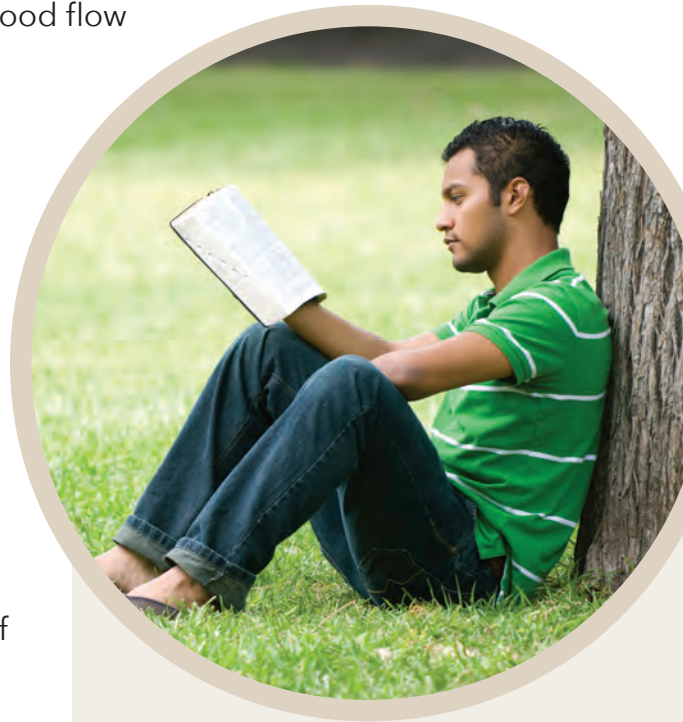
“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

Hebrews 10:24

Here are a few suggested activities to help you pursue brain health. Check one or two boxes next to the options you’d like to try – choose what works for you.

- Notice where your attention goes this week. Set a timer on your phone to go off every hour and write down what you were thinking about just before the timer went off. At the end of the week, look for patterns. What do you tend to think about? Do your thoughts tend to be more negative or more positive? How much attention do you give to the things of God or the words of Scripture? Do your thoughts encourage you to love your neighbor? Don’t be critical of yourself because of the things you think about. Just take this time to notice, to become aware.
- Take time each day this week to fill your attention with a truth from Scripture. See the article “Biblical Meditation” in the Appendix for ideas. See also the Memory Verses in the Appendix. See if you can commit one verse to memory.
- Take a break in a busy day to try a breathing exercise to relax your mind. Breathe in for four slow counts, hold for two counts, breathe out for four counts, hold for two counts. Do this ten times. Try to breathe as deeply and slowly as possible. Fill your belly with breath. You’ll be amazed at how much calmer you feel afterward. This slow, deep breathing will create more blood flow to the front of your brain.

- ❑ Commit to eating according to The Daniel Plan as a way of pursuing brain health. What is one step you can take, such as eliminating sugar from your diet this week, or eating only healthy fats?
- ❑ Do you snore when you sleep? Make an appointment to talk with your doctor about sleep apnea, a condition in which a person briefly stops breathing during sleep. Sleep apnea reduces blood flow to the brain, so if you have that condition, be aware that it can be treated.
- ❑ Get thirty minutes of aerobic exercise three times this week. It will increase blood flow to your brain.
- ❑ Try a form of exercise that requires coordination, such as dancing, table tennis, or juggling.
- ❑ Ask your doctor to do a blood test for vitamin D. If you haven't had your cholesterol and blood sugar tested recently, do those also.
- ❑ Start taking fish oil, which is full of omega - 3 fats that are good for your brain.
- ❑ Write down three things you are grateful for every day this week. Notice how it affects your mood.



Food Tip *of the Week*



Eating right is essential to thinking right, and thinking right is essential to living the life God intends for us. This week's food tip focuses on high-quality food for our brains. Try this recipe for a healthy brain smoothie to get your day started well. Just click the Food Tip of the Week on your video screen (3 minutes), scan the QR code, or go to danielplan.com/foodtip.



Fitness Move *of the Week*



Do you have discomfort or pain in your lower back? Learn a move to strengthen your back. Just click the Fitness Move of the Week on your video screen (1 minute), use the QR code, or go to danielplan.com/fitnessmove.



Praying Together

Because everything we do in our journey toward health depends on God's power, we end each meeting with prayer and encourage group members to pray for each other during the week.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

This week, offer prayers of gratitude to God. Thank him for the things you wrote down in question 4. Thank him for your brain and what you are learning about it. Give everyone in the group a chance to pray one- or two-sentence prayers of gratitude.

Have someone close with this prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for our brains. Thank you for the intricate ways they work, with a hundred billion nerve cells sending messages all over our bodies. Thank you for giving each of us the capacity to think wisely and make good decisions. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we will have deeper wisdom, and guide us to good decisions to care for our brains. We know that we are profoundly influenced simply by what we think about, so we want to fill our minds with thoughts of you. You are all-powerful, completely loving, and wise in all things. You sent your Son to die for us and rise from the dead. Please fill us anew with the wonder of such thoughts. Thank you for each person in this group. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

