



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Brain Health 101

Guest(s): Dr. Daniel Amen

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Roger Marsh: Welcome everyone, to Family Talk, a production of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we are revisiting another program that made our 2020 best of broadcast list. Hope you enjoy it.

Dr. Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk, a ministry of James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us today.

I want to begin this program with a question; have you ever thought about the design and functionality of your brain? It has over 100 billion nerve cells, more than a hundred thousand miles of blood vessels, and one quadrillion synapses. Synapses are the spaces between the nerve cells. Even more remarkable is the process of our brain interpreting and responding to the world around us.

You know, as far as we know, and we don't know much, it is truly the most complex system God created. In acknowledging this incredible mass of neural tissue, the great inventor, Thomas Edison, said, "The chief function of the body is to carry around the brain." I like that.

Every human being has a tremendous responsibility to care for one's brain, and that's what we're going to talk about with this broadcast. In a moment, you'll hear my colleague, Dr. Tim Clinton's, recent conversation on this topic with renowned neurologist and psychiatrist, Dr. Daniel Amen.

Dr. Amen is said to be America's foremost expert on brain health, and he's written over 30 books, and 70 scholarly articles. He founded the Amen Clinic, which serves over 4,000 patients per-month, at eight different locations around the country.

Dr. Amen's clinic also has the world's largest database of brain scans for important behavior research. As we get started, Dr. Amen and Dr. Clinton will identify the various factors that contribute to a healthy brain. They will also discuss the physical and chemical threats to our minds, and the mental differences between men and women. Boy, this is great stuff.

So, here's Dr. Clinton and our guest on this edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Clinton: As we get started, why don't we step back just for a moment, let's do brain health 101, kind of orient people to your area of specialization, what you've been up to. It's absolutely fascinating, the research that you're doing. And more than that, the findings that you're coming up with, they have implications for how we live out our everyday life. Your brain matters.

Dr. Amen: So when I started looking at the brain in 1991, I didn't care about my own brain at all. So, I was a double board-certified psychiatrist, physician, top student in my neuroscience department in medical school. But I just didn't care. And then when we started looking at the brain with this study called SPECT, I looked at mine and I'm like, "Oh, it's not healthy." And I played football in high school, and I had meningitis when I was a young soldier, and I had a lot of bad habits, like I'd only sleep four hours a night.

And when I fell in love with my brain, I then started treating it better. And 25 years later it's healthier, fuller, more active. And that's really the message of my life: you're not stuck with the brain you have. You can make it better. A couple of years ago, I horrified myself because I could summarize my work in three words.

One: care. You have to care about your brain. Nobody loves their brain, because you can't see it. You can see the wrinkles in your skin, or the fat around your belly, and you can do something when you're unhappy with it.

Dr. Clinton: Sure.

Dr. Amen: But because nobody looks, nobody knows. So, care.

Avoid anything that hurts your brain, and you just need to know the list, and a lot of it's obvious. What we know now is, football's sort of a brain-damaging sport, hockey, even jockeys, I got to scan the triple crown winner.

They fall from these magnificent animals, and your brain is soft, and your skull is hard. So care, avoid, do the right things for it. And we know what those things are, like sleep, and diet, and exercise, and simple supplementation. It can make a monster difference in your life.

Dr. Clinton: A lot of what you're teaching people comes from your research. You mentioned earlier that you have done a lot of scans. You mentioned the word SPECT. Some people understand MRIs. What's the difference, and what's the big picture of what you're learning about the brain? And I want to do application to simple things, like what we're learning on mental health, like depression. Is there a difference between the sexes and more?

Dr. Amen: Wow. So SPECT looks at blood flow and activity, it looks at how your brain works. So it's different than a CAT scan or an MRI.

Those look at the anatomy, SPECT looks at the function. And most mental health issues are not structural problems or anatomical problems, they're functional problems. Where your brain works too hard, or not hard enough.

And over the last, goodness now, 28 years, we've done 160,000 scans on patients from 121 countries. So we've been incredibly blessed. Our youngest patient is nine months, our oldest is 105, and last year I published the world's largest imaging study on 62,454 scans on how the brain ages.

And then we looked at, well, what accelerates aging? And schizophrenia was the worst. It significantly accelerated aging. But the second worse surprised us, it was marijuana. And it's such a huge societal conversation now, but virtually every area of the brain was lower in people who are regularly using marijuana, versus those who don't. Pretty interesting.

Dr. Clinton: I think people don't understand that your brain is an organ.

I think we all assume that your brain is always healthy, and that nothing damages it, or nothing could impact it. And it's that mindset that drives people. So they think, well, "Hey, it never goes awry." But nothing could be further from the truth and what you're doing, and what this new era of the brain is all about is revealing the brain itself, and how it can be impacted, and what the implications are of that very thing. Right?

Dr. Amen: No question about it. Get your brain right, and your mind will be better. But the whole mental health system is based on this book called the DSM, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. And what that does, it says, if you have five of these eight symptoms, you get a diagnosis of depression, and then you get an SSRI, or you get psychotherapy. And what the imaging has taught me, is depression is a cluster of symptoms, like chest pain.

Nobody gets a diagnosis of chest pain, because it doesn't tell you what causes it, or what to do for it. And depression, there's so many different ways to get depression. So you can have low thyroid, you can live in a mold-filled home, you can have the effects of a traumatic brain injury. There are so many different things, that to just call it a diagnosis and then go through these simple treatment algorithms, is just insane.

When you actually look at the brain and go, "Oh, you can be depressed because your brain works too hard, and you can't stop thinking negative things. Or you can be depressed because your brain doesn't work hard enough, and you don't have the mental energy, the brain energy, to be able to manage your life."

And so for example, if you go, "Hey Daniel, single most important thing you've learned from 160,000 scans?" Mild traumatic...

Dr. Clinton: Tell us the most important thing you've learned.

Dr. Amen: Mild traumatic brain injury ruins people's lives, and nobody knows about it.

So we did the big NFL study at a time when the NFL was having trouble with the truth about traumatic brain injury in football. And we scanned 300 players. They have four times the level of depression.

Dr. Clinton: I can't imagine what those scans looked like.

Dr. Amen: They are not good. Because people don't know that your brain is actually very soft, it's about the consistency of soft butter, tofu, custard, somewhere between egg whites and Jell-O. And it's housed in a hard skull that has sharp bony ridges. So if we agree, your brain controls everything you do, it's soft, it's complicated. Why would you ever put yourself at risk to hurt it? But because most people don't look, they don't know.

Dr. Clinton: Wow. I was thinking as you were talking, about Muhammad Ali, thinking about boxers and the repeated blows they take.

Dr. Amen: So I have his scan, I got to meet him and scan him.

Dr. Clinton: Really.

Dr. Amen: I loved him. And we've scanned three world heavyweight champions. It's not good news. But one of the things that's really interesting, and I'm a fan of Tom Brady, because even though he's playing football into his forties and I'm not really a fan of football, he does everything else in his life right. He eats perfectly. He sleeps nine hours. He knows how to manage stress.

So, if you're going to be in a brain-damaging job ... Think firefighters. Firefighters are in a brain-damaging job every day, with the toxins, the emotional stress, the head injuries they experience. If you're going to be in a head injury job or a brain-damaging job, you need to do everything else in your life right. So those of us who are therapists, who have ... Ultimately, we can get compassion fatigue from listening to everybody else's stress. If we're not living the message of brain health, we can't give it to anybody.

Because you have to live it in order to give it.

Dr. Clinton: You spent a lot of your life talking about a Brain Warrior's way. In other words, you really want people to become champions of this message, this way of life. What do you think are the two or three top things a person who's listening right now could do to help change their brain and change their life?

Dr. Amen: So, I actually work with this group at Stanford on how people change. And basically, here's two simple things. One, you have to love your brain. I mean, really start thinking about, is this good for my brain or bad for it? And when we talk about how people change, they don't change generally in big ways. They change in these small, tiny habits.

So what's the smallest thing I can do today that'll make the biggest difference for the rest of my life? You just, before you make a decision on what to eat, what to do, what to say, just ask yourself, is this good for my brain or bad for it?

Dr. Clinton: So you think that's really significant.

Dr. Amen: That is so important. And then, if you can answer that question with information - which is why I write - if information, these are good and these are not, and love ... Because doing the right thing is never because you should do it. I mean, that's just yuck. That's not a good motivator, "you should do this."

But if I love myself, and I love my wife, and I love my children, and I love my mission, the last thing I want to leave them with is my brain that's in trouble. And 50%, five-zero percent of the US population, if they live to 85, will be diagnosed with dementia. I'm not okay with that.

I developed this concept called Brain Envy. I always say, Freud was wrong. He was about three feet too low. It's your brain that you need to be concerned about. And once you love it, you start treating it better.

Dr. Clinton: Hey, you're listening to Family Talk. I'm your host, Dr. Tim Clinton. We're at the Rise Up World Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Our special in studio guest today, clinical neuroscientist and psychiatrist, physician, professor, New York Times bestselling author, Dr. Daniel Amen. One of my favorite guests.

Daniel, I wanted to ask you the difference between males and females. Is there a difference in their brains? And what is it, what'd you find?

Dr. Amen: So, I grew up with five sisters. And I have three daughters-

Dr. Clinton: I did too, I had five sisters.

Dr. Amen: Really?

Dr. Clinton: Yes.

Dr. Amen: Where are you in the order?

Dr. Clinton: I am right in the middle of the pack.

Dr. Amen: So I'm number three, I have an older brother, older sister, four younger sisters, which means I was completely not special growing up, but I grew up with a lot of estrogen.

And when we got this big database, one of my first questions to the database was, "what's the difference between males and females?"

Dr. Clinton: Sure.

Dr. Amen: So, we published a study on 46,000 brains, and we're not even the same species. Female brains are so much healthier, so much more active.

Dr. Clinton: Fascinating.

Dr. Amen: Especially in the frontal lobes, which means they're actually wired for leadership. But the problem is, 90% of female IQ is housed in their frontal lobes. Where for males, it's more widely distributed. So frontal lobe concussion, This is why girls should never hit a soccer ball with their head. A frontal lobe concussion is much more damaging for females than males.

Dr. Clinton: What else did you learn about them? What about men?

Dr. Amen: We learned that our occipital lobes and our cerebellum are busier than females, so coordination and vision, so we're really good at shooting things. But what surprised me is, our limbic brain is calmer than the female brain. Which means we suffer from depression half as much as females, but when we get depressed, we're much more likely to kill ourselves than women are.

Women attempt suicide three to four times more than men, but men complete it. Men actually follow through significantly more than women.

Dr. Clinton: You mentioned earlier the word love, that I thought was really significant. Because we're learning now in interpersonal neuroscience, that relationships can have the same mediating effect on the brain as good medicine.

That's a pretty profound statement, that if you have a healthy relationship with someone else, I'll add this, a healthy relationship with the creator God who you actually believe loves you, and pursues you and is there for you, that it actually can impact your brain. Can you help us understand that?

Dr. Amen: So we did a study on thoughts. And when you think positive, happy, hopeful, loving, connected thoughts, your brain is so much healthier than when you believe hopeless, helpless, worthless thoughts. And so, what you think about God, about your partner, about your work, really does matter to the physical health of your brain.

Yet, if you are in a chronically stressful relationship because one or both of the partners has a brain issue that nobody knows about, that bathing your brain in stress actually shrinks a part of your brain called the hippocampus, which is involved in mood and memory.

And so, a lot of couples are living in chronically stressful relationships because no one ... There's not a class in high school on, Relationship 101. And I did this one fun study on 500 couples, we call it the Couples from Hell study. So couples who fail marital therapy, and still want to be together.

And 85% of the time, one or both of them had brain issues that nobody knew about, because they never teach marital therapists - by and large, they never teach therapists about the brain, and so they're not asking them about traumatic brain injury. Did you have a flood in your house where you may be living with mold? Did you grow up on a farm with pesticides?

I mean the whole mental health...

Dr. Clinton: And what about living through or dealing with a lot of trauma in your life? And the impact of that on your brain.

Dr. Amen: And I published a study, actually Discover Magazine listed our research as one of the top 100 stories in science for 2015. I published a study on 21,000 people, showing I could separate emotional trauma ... Because what happens when you're emotionally traumatized, your limbic brain fires up, versus physical trauma. So, traumatic brain injury, that we could separate them with high levels of accuracy.

And that's really important, because if you don't get the diagnosis right, you can actually hurt people. If you think they have emotional trauma, but it's really from the concussions they had, you're going to calm their brain down with an SSRI, but you may be calming a brain that doesn't work hard enough, thereby disinhibiting that person, and then they can hurt themselves or someone else.

Dr. Clinton: Wow. So medical management, med management, becomes really important in that kind of care.

Dr. Amen: And what's happening in the United States today? 85% of psychiatric drugs are being prescribed by non-psychiatric physicians in 10 minute office visits, who do standard of care medicine 12% of the time. It's a nightmare what's happening. And for mental health, it's like if your heart has problems, people look at your heart. If your bones have problems, people look at your bones.

If your brain has problems, no one looks and they medicate you in the dark, which is part of the Brain Warrior's way, or the end of mental illness. Come on, it's not mental. The brain's an organ, you have to look at it, treat it with

reverence and respect, and then target the treatment to your brain. Of course, in the context of your life.

And what I love is it gets people better faster. So we have outcomes on 6,400 patients that have come to see us in our aid clinics. Our outcomes are better than anybody's I know on complex psychiatric issues. And I love that, because that's why God put me on the planet.

Dr. Clinton: You have been doing some direct applications about brain research and how we live out our lives. Fascinating new book, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Grades*. Every mom and dad wants to turn this up. I've got Johnny or Susan who, struggling in school. Is there an implication here? Is there a potential brain issue? College students, maybe there are different brain types. Or something that's going on here.

Dan, you can give us that five minute version about what this is all about.

Dr. Amen: School is so important. I mean, it sets you up for success, or really, failure. Learning not only how to do school, but taking care of the organ that gets you through, is so important.

Dr. Clinton: Yes.

Dr. Amen: So, we teach them, how do you have a better brain so that you can do better in school? What are the rituals through the day that you should do to optimize the physical function of your brain?

And then, what type of brain do you have? What we've seen with our scans is there are impulsive people, there are compulsive people, there are sad and anxious people. So know about your brain, because there are strategies to balance your brain, and then know about the brains of your friends. Know about the brains of your teachers. Because ultimately, teachers grade you. Learning how to get along with them is really important.

And then there are practical strategies on how to memorize, how to write a paper, how to do it from a brain perspective. And it's fun and it's practical, and I actually wrote it with my daughter and my niece, because I hadn't been in school in 40 years.

Dr. Clinton: You talk about science-based strategies to boost memory, strengthen your focus, and by the way, study faster. I think people listening, they understand learning styles. Meaning, some people are visual. They learn by seeing things. Some people learn by hearing, that's how they process. You know that? Some people like to write, and process as they write. Okay?

People get that, but I'm not sure they really understand this. But you're saying, listen, there are different brain types that impact how we learn, how we

process, how we can boost this process. And it's real, it's science-based. What do you mean by that?

Dr. Amen: Well, it's based on a lot of the research we've done, but also the research on other people. When you get your brain right you perform better, and it's that sense of competence that helps our self-esteem soar.

Dr. Clinton: Wow. We're fighting the clock. I want you to talk to mom, dad out there, maybe on a personal level about their brain health, and then about their family. And why in this kind of Brain Warrior way of calling the family individuals to a whole new perspective on how to see and live their life in light of this new brain research, and understanding that's unfolding with us.

And how can they, by the way, learn more about what you're doing? I'm sure there are parents out there saying, listen, my son has ADHD. I've got a child that just has a lot of overwhelming defiance, or something. I just want to know what to do?

Dr. Amen: And nobody thinks about the brain, that their brain could be working too hard. So I did a study on oppositional defiant disorder, and their brains work way too hard. But if you're listening, I just want you to take a few things away from this.

Your brain matters. It's involved in everything you do. When it works right, you work right, and when it's troubled, you're going to have trouble in your life. If you want your children to have healthy brains, you have to first get yours right. Because what I've learned is, nobody changes when you tell them to change.

They change when they see you have changed. So, if you live the message of brain health, if you live the message of brain health, then you can give it away. If you don't live it, you can't give it.

And so learn about our work. People can go to amenclinics.com, and learn all about the things we do. We have eight clinics around the country and I've written 40 books, insane. But what I get excited about is, you're not stuck with the brain you have, you can make it better. And if someone's struggling, they should think about coming to one of the clinics. Because how do you know why, unless someone's actually looking at your brain?

Dr. Clinton: Dr. Amen, it's always a delight to be with you. Thanks for joining us.

Dr. Amen: Thank you, my friend.

Roger Marsh: For additional information on any of our guests this month, go to the broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Thanks for listening, and be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Family Talk's 2020 Best of Broadcast Collection.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson family Institute.

Dr. Dobson: Hello everyone, this is James Dobson, inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So, join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?

Roger Marsh: Hi, this is Roger Marsh for Family Talk. Do you remember Dr. Dobson's touching interview with Lysa TerKeurst?

Lysa TerKeurst: I had to start understanding that forgiveness was as much from my heart as anyone else's and it was a great first step of healing.

Roger Marsh: Or what about the powerful interview with John Eldredge?

John Eldredge: We'd rather be distracted than spend 10 minutes quiet with ourselves.

Roger Marsh: There were so many great Family Talk moments this past year, it might be hard for you to pick your favorite. But don't worry, we've done it for you! We've selected 18 of the most popular broadcasts of the past year and present them to you together on six audio CDs in the 2020 Family Talk best-of-broadcast collection. These entertaining and informative programs are sure to bless you and become a cherished part of your family resource library. This compelling CD set is our thank you for a donation of any amount in support of Family Talk here at the end of the year. We are also blessed to share that your gift today will be doubled by a special matching grant while it lasts. Contact us now for more information at 877-732-6825, or visit drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org.