

HERE ARE 10 THINGS I AVOID (AND WHAT I DO INSTEAD) INSPIRED BY INSIGHTS FROM NEUROSCIENTIST PATRICIA SCHMIDT



Life becomes easier when you stop giving your mental energy to the wrong things. Neuroscientist Patricia Schmidt explains that your brain is constantly forming patterns. Every day, your choices either strengthen your mind or weaken it. But most people try to fix their life by adding more routines, more habits, more tasks. In reality, the real change happens when you remove the habits that silently drain your mental power.

Here are the ten things I stopped doing, how each one affected my mind, and what I learned to do instead.

1. I Don't Chase Motivation What I do instead: I build small micro-actions that are easy to start. Schmidt says the brain doesn't wait for motivation. It releases motivation after you begin. Action produces dopamine, and dopamine produces momentum.

Example: If I need to study, I don't make big promises to myself. I simply open the book and read one paragraph. That tiny action is enough to wake the brain up and start a reward cycle. Within minutes, I often end up doing 20 or 30 minutes of focused work without forcing myself.

2. I Don't Run From Discomfort What I do instead: I use a 90-second discomfort window. The brain's stress chemicals peak for only 60 to 90 seconds. Most people run away at the peak, so the brain never learns that they can survive it. But if you stay still during the peak, your mind adapts.

Example: Before a tough conversation, I feel anxiety rising. Earlier, I would avoid it. Now, I set a 90-second timer and sit with the feeling. I don't fight it. I just observe my breathing and let the emotion pass. And every time, the intensity drops by itself, making the task easier to do.

3. I Don't Multitask What I do instead: I work in simple single-task blocks. Schmidt explains that multitasking cuts your brain efficiency almost in half. The brain cannot do two complex tasks at the same time. It switches rapidly between them, which drains energy and increases stress.

Example: If I'm studying, I don't open WhatsApp, YouTube, or Instagram in between. I choose one task, set a 20-minute timer, and work only on that. My mind stays calmer, my productivity increases, and I feel less tired afterward.

4. I Don't Argue With My Own Thoughts What I do instead: I label the thought and let it pass. When you label an emotion, the amygdala (the fear center) becomes less active. The brain shifts from emotional mode to rational mode.

Example: When a negative thought enters my mind like "You're failing" or "You won't make it," I don't fight with it. I don't try to prove it wrong. I simply say, "This is anxiety. This is my brain trying to keep me safe." Naming the emotion reduces the emotional charge, and the thought loses its power.

5. I Don't Start My Day With My Phone What I do instead: I warm up my brain gently. The first few minutes after waking decide your focus pattern for the entire day. If you start with dopamine spikes from scrolling, your brain becomes restless and distracted for hours.

Example: When I open my eyes, I avoid touching my phone. I get up, drink water, stretch my back, and take a minute of sunlight. These small things activate the brain slowly and naturally. I feel more grounded and ready instead of overwhelmed.

6. I Don't Overthink Decisions What I do instead: I use the 2-minute clarity rule. The brain consumes a lot of energy when forced to make too many choices. Decision fatigue makes you tired, unfocused, and irritated.

Example: If a decision can be made in less than 2 minutes, I don't delay it. Selecting clothes, replying to simple messages, choosing what to eat, or planning small tasks – I decide quickly. It keeps my mental energy free for important decisions.

7. I Don't Let My Emotions Control My Entire Day What I do instead: I let emotions inform me, not define me. Emotions are temporary signals. They are not the truth about your life. Schmidt says the brain reacts first, but you choose your response.

Example: Some days I wake up low or irritated. Earlier, I would assume the whole day is ruined. Now I

pause and ask myself, "What does my brain need right now?" Maybe it needs food, a short walk, water, or silence. When I respond to the need instead of reacting to the emotion, I regain control.

8. I Don't Spend Time With People Who Drain My Energy What I do instead: I choose nervous-system-friendly relationships. Your brain literally mirrors the emotional states of the people around you. If someone is always complaining, shouting, or negative, your mind absorbs it.

Example: I don't cut people off harshly. I simply reduce how much time I give them. And I spend more time with people who are calm, grounded, and supportive. My anxiety reduces naturally, and I feel more mentally stable.

9. I Don't Keep Everything In My Head What I do instead: I offload thoughts, tasks, and worries. The brain was never designed to store multiple things at once. When you keep everything inside, your mind enters a loop of constant reminders and stress.

Example: At night, I write down everything: tasks I need to do, things I'm worried about, ideas that come randomly, or reminders I might forget. Once it's written, my mind stops repeating it. I sleep faster and wake up clearer.

10. I Don't Wait For The Perfect Moment What I do instead: I start before I feel ready. The brain builds confidence only after action. Waiting for perfection keeps you stuck, and over-planning kills momentum.

Example: When I want to start something new – studying a new topic, exercising, making content, or working on a project – I begin with imperfect steps. I don't wait to feel confident. Once I start moving, confidence follows. The brain learns by doing, not thinking.

Final Thought Removing these ten habits changed my mental world more than adding any new habit ever could. Your brain responds to whatever environment and patterns you create for it. When you stop feeding it stress, chaos, and confusion, it naturally shifts into clarity and focus. You don't need to force discipline or motivation. You need to stop the things that block your mind from functioning at its best.