

“Addicted to work? Stop what you’re doing and read this book. . . .

A fascinating tale of the virtues of the resting brain.”

—Anna Lembke, MD, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dopamine Nation*

The Brain at Rest



How the Art and
Science of Doing Nothing
Can Improve Your Life

Joseph Jebelli, PhD



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Discussion Guide

The Brain at Rest:

How the Art & Science of Doing Nothing Can Improve Your Life.

Author: Joseph Jebelli, Ph.D.

Genre: Health and Science Non-Fiction

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1

Jebelli argues that modern life has largely eliminated true mental downtime. After reading the book, how would you define “the brain at rest” in your own words, and do you feel you currently experience it in your daily life?

2

Which scientific explanation of the default mode network (DMN) surprised you the most, and how did learning about its role in creativity, memory consolidation, and self-reflection change your view of daydreaming or “doing nothing”?

3

The book contrasts the constant stimulation of smartphones and multitasking with periods of intentional boredom. Have you noticed any personal effects (positive or negative) from reducing screen time or allowing yourself to be bored since starting the book?

4

Jebelli explores historical and cultural attitudes toward idleness (from ancient philosophers to Puritan work ethic). Which historical perspective resonated with you, and do you think society’s current stigma around “wasting time” is justified?

5

The author presents evidence that rest and mind-wandering may help prevent or delay neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s. How did this connection affect your feelings about prioritizing rest—not just sleep, but true mental idle time?

6

Jebelli describes several practical ways to cultivate a resting brain (walking without podcasts, “niksen,” staring out windows, etc.). Which technique are you most likely to try, and which seems the hardest to implement in your current lifestyle?

7

Were you convinced by the author’s argument that some of our best ideas and emotional insights emerge precisely when we stop trying to be productive? Can you share a personal example that either supports or challenges this idea?

8

How did the book challenge or reinforce your existing beliefs about productivity culture, hustle mentality, and the idea that “busyness equals importance”?

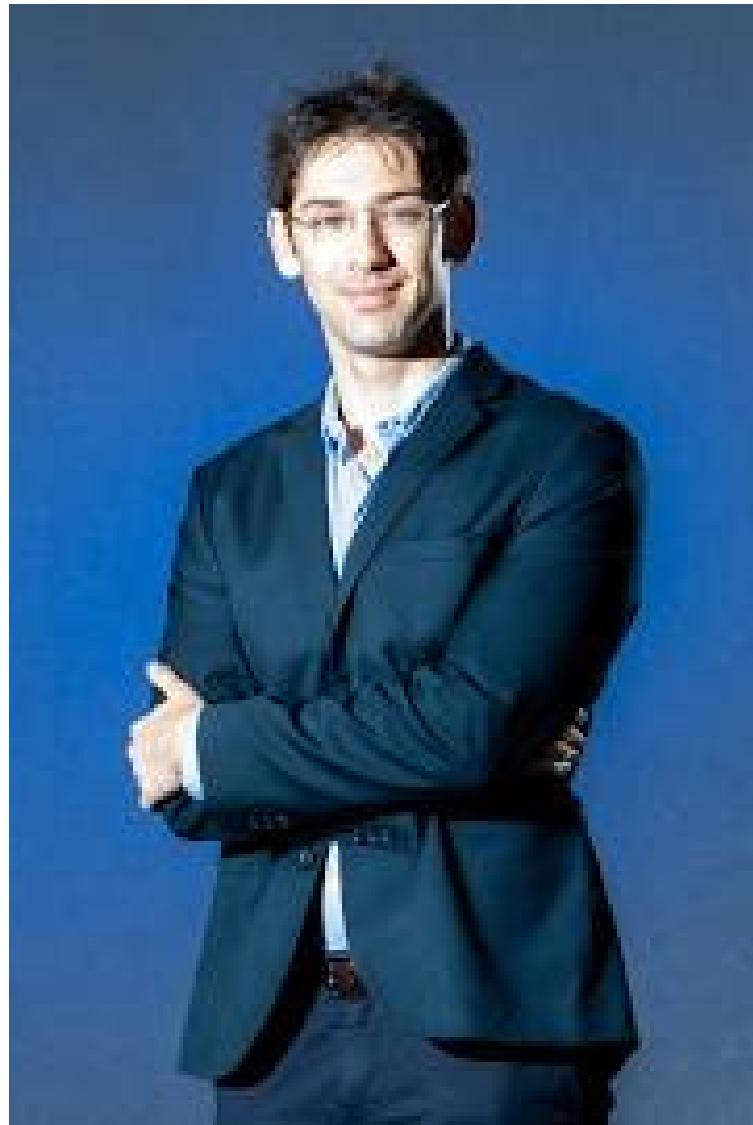
9

Jebelli touches on the paradox that in trying to schedule or optimize rest, we can accidentally turn it into another task. Have you ever experienced “rest guilt” or felt pressure to rest “correctly”? How does the book suggest we get around this?

10

If you could give one piece of advice from this book to a friend who says they “don’t have time to do nothing,” what would it be—and has reading the book changed how you plan to protect your own mental downtime going forward?

About the Author



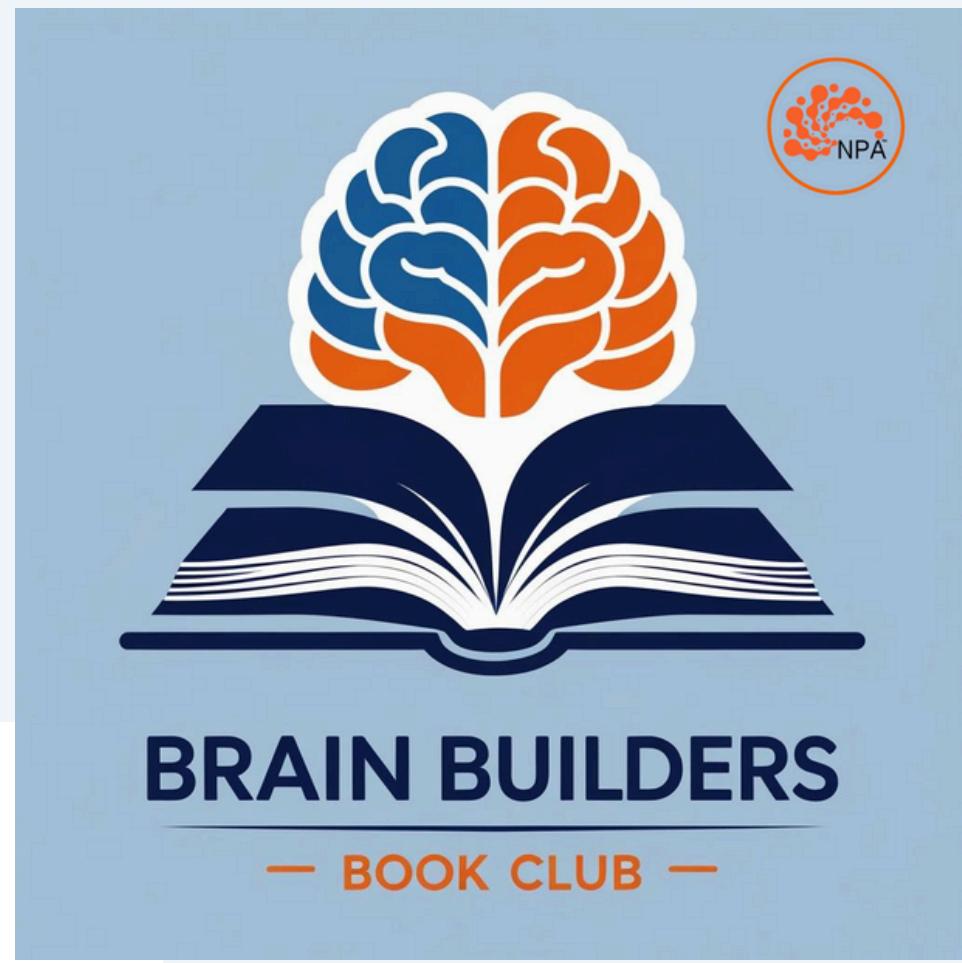
Joseph Jebelli, Ph.D.

The Times as “the Indiana Jones of neuroscience,” Jebelli has a rare gift for turning complex brain science into page-turning narrative without ever sacrificing rigour.

With *The Brain at Rest* (2025), his third book, he turns his lens to the hidden power of the brain’s quiet moments (daydreaming, stillness, and sleep) and how reclaiming them may be the single most important thing we can do for long-term cognitive health. Joseph’s writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *New Scientist*, and *BBC Science Focus*, and he is a frequent speaker at literary and science festivals worldwide. He lives in London, where he is already at work on his next book.

Joseph Jebelli, Ph.D. is a British neuroscientist, writer, and one of the most engaging voices in popular science today. He holds a PhD in neuroscience from University College London, where he specialised in the cellular mechanisms of Alzheimer’s disease. His research has been published in top journals including *Nature Neuroscience* and *Brain*, and he has worked in leading labs across the UK and the United States.

He first came to widespread attention with his acclaimed debut *In Pursuit of Memory* (2017), a global journey through the science and human stories of Alzheimer’s that was shortlisted for the Royal Society Science Book Prize and translated into fifteen languages. Described by



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