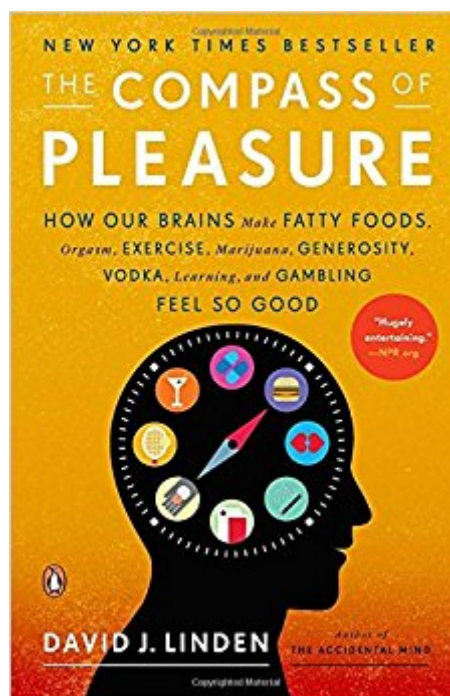


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# The Compass Of Pleasure: How Our Brains Make Fatty Foods, Orgasm, Exercise, Marijuana, Generosity, Vodka, Learning, And Gambling Feel So Good



## Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author comes a "hugely entertaining" (NPR.org) look at vice and virtue through cutting-edge science. As he did in his award-winning book *The Accidental Mind*, David J. Linden—a highly regarded neuroscientist, professor, and writer—“weaves empirical science with entertaining anecdotes to explain how the gamut of behaviors that give us a buzz actually operates. *The Compass of Pleasure* makes clear why drugs like nicotine and heroin are addictive while LSD is not, how fast food restaurants ensure that diners will eat more, why some people cannot resist the appeal of a new sexual encounter, and much more. Provocative and illuminating, this is a radically new and thorough look at the desires that define us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

By merging an evolutionary perspective with cutting-edge research in neuroscience, Linden, a professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, addresses provocative questions about the relationship between pleasure and addiction while exploring many of the broader implications of the nexus of the two. “Understanding the biological basis of pleasure leads us to fundamentally rethink the moral and legal aspects of addiction to drugs, food, sex, and gambling and the industries that manipulate these pleasures.” Linden (*The Accidental Mind*) is admirable at explaining complex scientific concepts for the nonspecialist. He focuses most of his attention on the role played by the small portion of our gray matter known as the medial forebrain pleasure circuit and demonstrates how both behavior and chemistry can activate its neurons. He

also discusses the somewhat counterintuitive conclusion that addiction is often associated with decreased pleasure. Linden's conversational style, his abundant use of anecdotes, and his successful coupling of wit with insight makes the book a joy to read. Even the footnotes are sprinkled with hidden gems. (Apr.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"A hugely entertaining look at why we enjoy the things we enjoy. ... There's hardcore biology here, but it's tempered with personal anecdotes, penetrating observations and quotes from the likes of comedian Mitch Hedberg and Wilco frontman Jeff Tweedy. If you're science-phobic, don't worry: Linden is incredibly smart, but comes across as the funny, patient professor you wish you'd had in college." -"National Public Radio", Michael Schaub "This cheerful summary of the brain's reward system is a profound experience... "Pleasure" is a superb book. My brain has been changed by reading it." -"The Guardian" (UK), Leo Benedictus

If the title of this review seems somehow cleverly conversational yet awkwardly technical, then I have indeed captured the paradox of Linden's latest book, "The Compass of Pleasure." It's a great piece of science writing, infused with wit, humor, and insight, yet the author demands a lot of the general reader. Linden refuses to "dumb down" the incredibly complex workings of the brain, and with scholarly discipline he avoids tabloid overgeneralizing from current research findings. Therefore, in addition to the many colorful stories and insightful theories explaining pleasure-seeking and addictive behaviors, Linden has included descriptions of many complex neuroscience experiments on brains both rat and human, as well as detailed descriptions of biological processes right down to the cellular and even sub-cellular level. At times it was slow going even for me as a physician, and parts of the book will certainly be over the heads of non-science types. Nonetheless, I feel that Linden has handled the topic masterfully, and - mark my words - if anyone can ever make the terms "Medial Forebrain Bundle", "Ventral Tegmental Area", or "Parahippocampal Gyrus" into household names, then it will certainly be David J. Linden! Pleasure (and its close relatives including reward, satisfaction, and addiction) and pain govern a lot of human behavior. Amazingly, due to brain science research we now know nearly all of the parts of the brain involved in the "pleasure and reward" circuitry. This knowledge represents a tremendous advance in human knowledge and eventually will hold the key to helping humankind greatly with our struggles that represent the chapters of the book - drug use, eating behavior, sexual behavior (and misbehavior), gambling, and other pleasure-oriented behaviors. However, as one realizes from

reading this fascinating book, we are still near the beginning of our arc of understanding of our own complex brains. For pleasure does not exist in isolation in the human brain; rather pleasure interacts intimately with other brain processes. Pleasure circuits interact with memory circuits (how else will our brains keep a mental record of our pleasurable pastimes?). Pleasure circuitry interacts with learning circuitry (how else will we learn how to reproduce pleasurable activities?). Pleasure circuitry interacts with circuitry for experiencing other emotions, and with sensory input and motor output circuitry, and with more abstract centers in the cortex that govern functions such as "salience", foresight, judgment, and planning. All of this makes for a fascinating read on the pleasure centers of the human brain that answers many interesting questions about everything from sex addiction to slot machines, from obesity to exercise addiction, but also - like any good scientific writing - raises more questions than it answers, including that eternal conundrum (as I watch my bright and talented 9 year-old ignoring her favorite breakfast while clicking away furiously on her electronic gaming device): how much do we really, truly differ from that proverbial lab rat mashing away at the lever delivering squirts of cocaine directly into his "medial forebrain bundle"?

With just enough scientific theory to add credibility, and a nice helping of wit, this book offers an easy and informative peek into emerging neuroscience. Particularly for those of us who have had careers or life experiences that may have over exposed us to humankind's baser behaviors, this discussion comes as a confirmation of what we already suspected: the evolving man's brain has a long way to go before we are fully separated from the other primates that share our planet! Although the author is careful to avoid the sweeping generalizations and unsubstantiated theories that are frequently part of mass market scientific literature, he makes a strong case for fully considering the nature side of addictive, even self destructive, human behaviors. In his concluding "the future of pleasure", he even allows a bit of hope for how some of these behaviors (and the misery they can bring) might some day be altered by science. All in all, an important book that is as enlightening as it is entertaining.

Not exactly light reading, author uses lab rats as examples to describe clinical concepts related to brain & nervous systems innerworkings, so technical terminology is standard lingo throughout the book. Which makes this book very educational, but also challenging to follow. I've mentioned this because of the blurb printed on the back cover, "a hugely entertaining look at why we enjoy . . .". Might be entertaining for readers with masters or PHD. on the subject.

This book is easy to read and understand. It gives You an indeep understanding on how our mind works in terms of our brain reward system.I have enjoyed it all along the reading covering several critical aspects of our complex and still somewhat misterious pleasure engine.

There is a lot of information in this book regarding the mind and human nature/desires. I did find it a bit of a heady read. Something you need to be in the mood for when deciding to extrapolate information from it.

Quite didactic in presentation of neuro-anatomy and physiology. Fairly informative, nonetheless but requires concentration to get through the book.

This is a fascinating book, dense though it may be. While probably not a textbook, per se, it does delve deeply into the structures and chemicals in the brain that create the experiences of pleasure and enjoyment, and thus, reinforce habits - good or bad. It is a great adjunct to other books on habit, willpower, neuroscience and neuroplasticity.

A general text for both professional and layperson on the dynamics of neurotransmitters and how they influence pleasure and addiction.

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