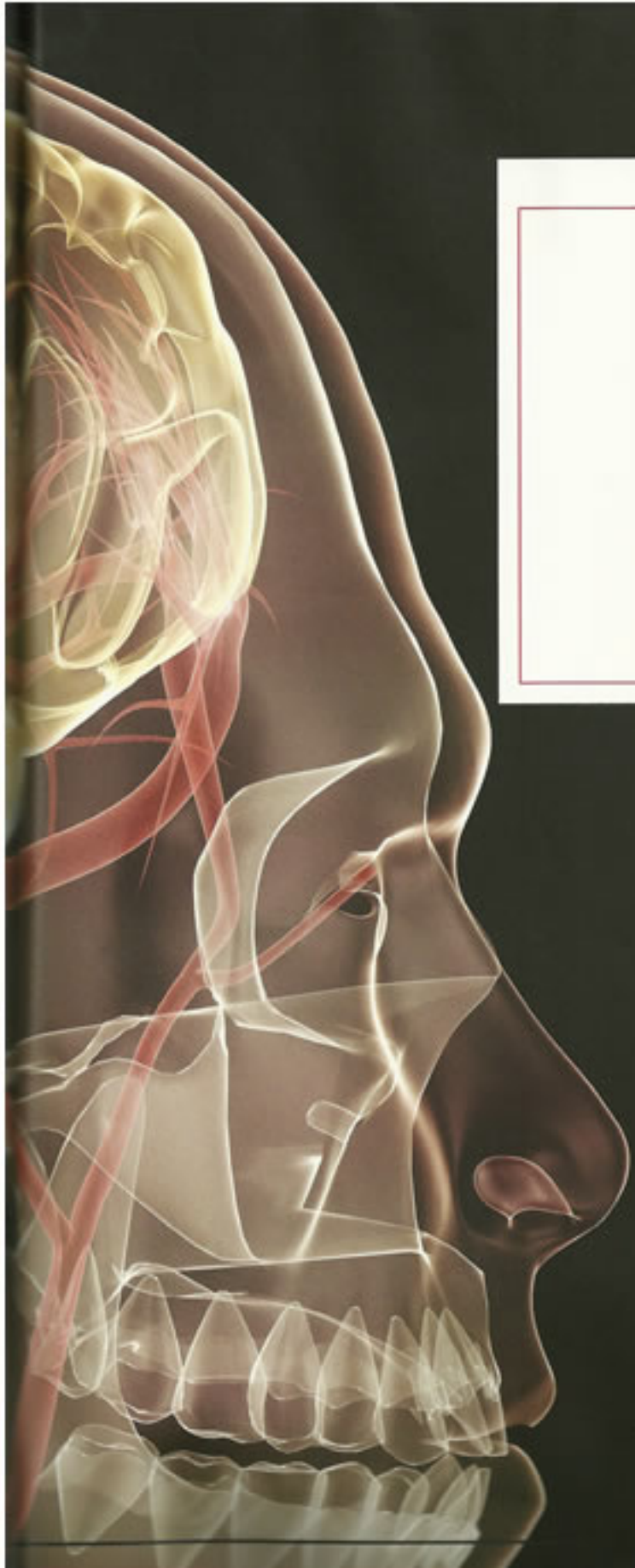


# MIND GAMES

When athletes tell you that they win races due to the power of positive thinking, do you want to laugh in their faces? Us too until we heard all about NLP

words: Dan Roberts  
photography: iStockphoto



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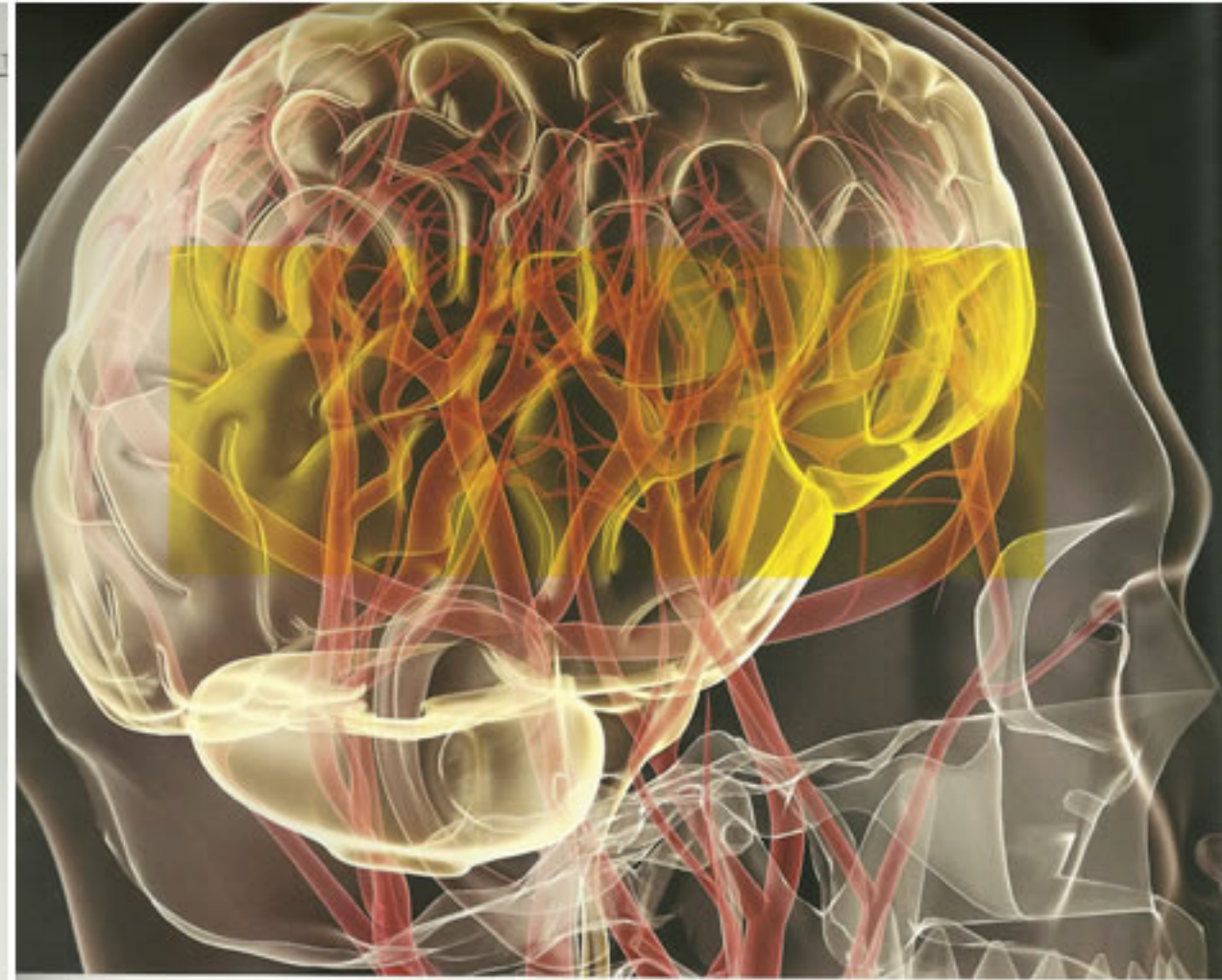
or those of you who are training for a marathon you will no doubt be aware that the mental side of running is key. The more you control your emotions, stay motivated and believe in yourself the more success and enjoyment you'll have.

NLP stands for Neuro Linguistic Programming and is essentially a series of techniques that were developed and borrowed from other therapies to help people gain more success in life. Techniques were developed by modelling the thought patterns and processes of highly successful people. While controversial in academic circles, nearly all self-help books, executive coaches and many sports psychologists embrace NLP. In fact, every professional golfer, boxer, runner, tennis player and footballer that I've ever worked with over the last 10 years has known of NLP and used some of its techniques.

## MISSING TRAINING? NOT PUSHING YOURSELF? YOU'RE SLACKING OFF, YOU NEED THE NLP CURE

### "I CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO RUN TONIGHT"

Losing motivation is one of the most common barriers to running success. Are you missing training sessions? Not pushing yourself when you run? Forgetting to do your physio exercises? Wimping out when it gets cold? Or maybe having a few cheeky midweek beers? All these are signs of slackening motivation. The NLP cure would be to make your goals more compelling via a bit of daydreaming or visualisation. Goals are fundamental to success. So write them down in the first person, the



more the better. Make them specific, measurable with a time frame and make them compelling. For example, "run a sub-four hour marathon and enjoy it." Now imagine actually completing this goal. How does it feel? Play it out in your mind in precise detail, experience it through your own eyes (associated perspective). It wants to be as real as a memory. This helps to focus your mind into achieving that goal.

### "I CAN'T GO ON"

While actually running at some point you will embark on a battle between your inner athlete and your inner couch potato. Though, to be fair most professional athletes have off days when they just don't feel like training or their head isn't in the right place. The solution? Using NLP means you can put yourself into a harmonious body/mind state - no battles, just effortless moving. In fact our best performances are when we are in this state.

Problems arise when we go from this unconscious effortless state to conscious negative state. We start becoming aware of injuries; our mind starts to think about a million things. This usually marks the beginning of the end of a good run.

Emma James ([www.emmajames.net](http://www.emmajames.net)), a Mental Optimum Performance Specialist based

in Manchester, suggests the following NLP cure: "While still running, refocus on what you want to feel and what you want from this run today. Think of a past run where you felt happy and relaxed, as if flowing, your strides and breathing were effortless.

"Relive the event, how it feels, think about breathing, muscles, posture, what you see, put yourself back in that moment. This sets off a

## YOU'LL HAVE TO BATTLE BETWEEN YOUR INNER COUCH POTATO AND YOUR INNER ATHLETE

chain of chemical reactions that filter through your system that will impact directly on your current mental state."

### SELF-SABOTAGE

The fear of failure is endemic among many runners that we actually sub-consciously sabotage our own success.

The first step is to fully understand your opinion of yourself; you can do this by asking yourself honest questions about your beliefs, performance and ability.

When confronted with a fear of failure Emma says: "If faced with underlying doubt of your own ability, ask yourself 'what if I do fail?' The outcome is that you will get better insight into who you are and what you can learn from this; you will get a unique experience, a gift that can benefit you for your next race."

While thinking about the worst-case scenario has its uses, it's not advisable to dwell on the negative for too long. To get back into a positive, resourceful state, refocus on your goals.

NLP is a fascinating set of tools that helps a lot of people. Its popularity and its limitations arise from the same issue: anyone can do it. You don't need a psychology degree to gain some benefit from its techniques. Therefore, when looking for a NLP coach, look further than their NLP qualification and at their entire CV.

A good trainer can teach you all kinds of mental skills to help you not only in running but also in life in general, [www.findlifecoach.co.uk](http://www.findlifecoach.co.uk) is a good starting point as is *The NLP Workbook* by Joseph O'Connor.

So when you do start to flag, keep thinking one thing: it's all in the mind. **EB**