

How Crochet and Knitting Help the Brain

10.11.17 | by [Betty Houtman](#) | Anxiety Management

I am a nurse and lifelong knitter with a calling to bring my best self in service to others.

My background in neuro-developmental pediatrics and experience working with children and adults with brain injury, spinal cord injury, strokes, and neurological disorders, led to a fascination with neuroplasticity and the ability of the brain to “rewire” itself.

Because the practice of knitting/crochet is so helpful in dealing with anxiety, the ARC was the first organization I approached, and they, and you, were interested! I’m very excited for this opportunity [to teach these skills](#) as a tool to quiet the mind, mend the brain, and soothe the soul.

My grandmother taught me to crochet when I was about 8 years old, and I could hardly wait to join 4H knitting! I’ve been knitting or crocheting ever since. Now I’m exploring ways to combine these interests and abilities to improve the health and well-being of others.

Betty Corkhill, [Knit for Health & Wellness – How to Knit a Flexible Mind and More](#), really helped me get started on my mission. I feel it is the best collection of anecdotes and evidence available.

Consider these seven reasons why knitting and crocheting can help you with your anxiety:

Hand movements

Bilateral, coordinated, precise hand movements are hard work for the brain, and crossing over midline requires even more brainwork. As a result, we are less able to pay attention to other issues and concerns. In other words, knitting “distracts” the brain.

Repetitive movement

Many of us use repetitive, rhythmic movement like pacing, rocking, tapping, picking, hair pulling, smoking, drinking, or eating, to calm ourselves when we are stressed or traumatized. There are many, many stories of people who have replaced an anxiety crutch with knitting or crochet. Knitters with PTSD report they have fewer flashbacks and other symptoms.

Safety “bubble”

Holding the hands together in front of the body creates the sensation of having a protective “bubble” of personal space and comfort and is especially helpful in threatening or anxiety-producing situations.

Eye contact is optional

It’s totally acceptable in knitting groups to make eye contact only when you choose to. Same thing with conversation, although greeting others upon arrival, and saying goodbye when you leave, is recommended. Knitting groups are safe places where conversations about knitting often lead to other topics: and choosing whether or not to participate means that you are in control.

Portability

Knitting and crochet can go almost anywhere with you! Just tuck it into a pocket, purse, or tote, and a solution is always nearby for when symptoms of anxiety and panic arise. Even visualizing the movements and feelings of knitting can help in most situations. Any easy (mindless) project is best for places with distractions; a new pattern or technique is best for distracting the mind and growing new brain pathways.

Sensory

There are so many beautiful colors, an array of textures, and soft, bristly, smooth, or bumpy fibers to choose from! They provide pleasing visual, tactile, and perceptual feedback to our bodies and brains.

Hormone level

More serotonin is released with repetitive movement, which improves mood and sense of calmness. After you've learned knitting or crochet, it can also reduce blood levels of cortisol—the stress hormone.

New neuropathways can be created and strengthened by learning new skills and movements. As they become stronger with use, we “change our minds” to become quieter and more relaxed.

“The feeling experienced as your mind flows into the movement of knitting can teach you what it feels like to be relaxed, and you can learn to recall this feeling even when you don’t have knitting in hand,” a local knitter commented.

Betty Houtman is a nurse and lifelong knitter/crocheter. She is using her vast skill set to help people learn how to quiet the mind, mend the brain, and soothe the soul.