

RETHINK AND REWIRE RISK IN YOUR BRAIN

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As the Coronavirus Pandemic is being researched more scientific information is being published. Sanjay Gupta's 2021 book entitled "WORLD WAR C, Lessons From The COVID – 19 Pandemic And How To Prepare For The Next One" gives a background on viruses and the general unhealthiness of the American people, then outlines how we can become pandemic PROOF. (1)

Understanding how the brain operates is necessary to evaluate and deal with unseen threats. Perhaps most intriguing is the way the brain assesses risk because more than anyone or anything else in your life, your brain wants to keep you safe.

Over the past year Gupta created his own way of understanding and assessing risk during a pandemic as well as any similar threat that is both invisible and novel. Each of us has to create our own understanding on assessing risks; it will not be perfect and it must be highly flexible, able to change as the threat evolves. More than anything else, though, it must start with an understanding of the individual who is evaluating the risk. While none of us have a memory of this virus, given that it is novel, we do have a baseline tolerance for risk overall, and that tolerance is perhaps the truest reflection of who we are and what we value.

With COVID entrenched in our environment, we will now have to regularly evaluate risk and make decisions that affect not just ourselves but everyone around us – loved ones and strangers alike. Although we have been making decisions all of our lives that affect others, the pandemic adds a new complication that each individual must consider like never before. The virus may mutate down a notch or two to become less virulent and deadly, but its presence will nevertheless probably be perpetual.

As technology improves and we continually learn more, we will likely see improvements to indoor ventilation systems and protective measures that could make indoor spaces safer overall, but the risk will never be zero. And we may never reach that elusive herd immunity in the United States or worldwide no matter how much we try to vaccinate. And those who are not vaccinated for whatever reason can fuel breakthrough cases and more variants. The world will remain a patchwork quilt of populations that will experience outbreaks.

The real question we all have to ask ourselves is this: What's the chance something will happen to me? You can have low -, medium-, and high-risk labels on various activities but still be stuck trying to figure out how they apply to you and your personal risk profile.

(1) Sanjay Gupta, WORLD WAR C, Lessons from the COVID – 19 PANDEMIC and how to Prepare for the Next One (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), pp. 162-163, 167-169, 172.