

The Brain Loves a Challenge. Here's Why.

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As a rock climber, I fight against gravity while I scale the walls and their rocklike holds. But my arms invariably fatigue, my grip slips with sweat, and, sometimes, my nerves question whether I should stick to easier climbing routes.

Trying to do hard things is, well, hard. And exerting ourselves physically and mentally often feels bad.

Yet we seek out these challenges without any obvious extrinsic reward. I'm paying a monthly membership fee for the experience of flailing and falling in a rock-climbing gym.

Others go even further, scaling mountains, running [marathons](#) or even [ultramarathons](#). And many people spend their leisure time exercising their minds on crossword puzzles, strategizing in board games, or playing video games.

Our penchant for doing hard things that make us feel bad is what researchers call the [Effort Paradox](#). Trying hard is costly and aversive, but it's something humans value.

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