



MENTAL FITNESS: MANAGING THE HEALTH OF OUR MINDS

Karen Gately | Founder, Corporate Dojo 📍 <https://www.corporatedojo.com>
✉ info@corporatedojo.com

Karen Gately

How well do you maintain the mental strength needed to keep up with the demands of your job and life? Do you have the mental stamina, focus and resilience it takes to keep doing what you do, to a high standard? To what extent does your mind enable or undermine your ability to succeed, especially when under pressure? Reflect for a moment on the thoughts and emotions that dominate your mind and underpin the decisions you make.

When the internal dialogue we entertain reinforces limiting beliefs, undermines the strength of our spirit or erodes our hope for the future, our chances of success are dramatically diminished. It's unquestionably true that with a healthy and fit mind we're entirely more likely to be at our best and achieve to standards reflective of our true potential.

So, what does it mean to be mentally fit. You're likely to be at least somewhat familiar with the measures of physical fitness and appreciate the extent to which having strength, endurance, flexibility and aerobic fitness make a positive difference to our ability to live life well. Similarly, mental fitness is about keeping your brain and emotional health 'in shape'.

It's relatively common for people to incorporate exercise and / or healthy eating into their list of daily priorities. Most of us know we should at least try. When it comes to mental fitness however, far fewer people take deliberate steps to develop the strength, agility and durability of their mind. Four essential steps you can take to lift the fitness of your mind include these.

Exercise: As the age old saying goes, healthy body, healthy mind. Physical activity has been proven to have a positive influence on the health of our mind. It not only increases the flow of oxygen to your brain but also the release of endorphins, chemicals in our brain that essentially make us feel good.

If you, like a lot of other people, find it hard to stick to an exercise routine, because you simply don't enjoy working out, look for ways to incorporate movement into what you do like doing. For example, if you don't like going to the gym, go for walks with your friends or even have meetings while you walk around the block. Go dancing regularly or join a club that has you up and on your feet – lawn bowls, archery, orienteering to name just a few, are all activities that will allow you to socialise while being active.

Meditation: Used for centuries by cultures around the globe, the practice of meditation has been proven to improve mental fitness. Countless studies report that meditation helps relieve anxiety and depression, improve concentration and enhance overall psychological well-being. Fascinating research by Yale University, found that mindfulness meditation decreases the extent to which our mind wanders. Mind wandering is often associated with rumination and worry about the past or the future. Our ability therefore to remain in the present reduces the stress and anxiety our mind creates by wondering into unhelpful thoughts.

Mental workout sessions: Reading, writing and brain games such as

memory exercises or puzzles are reported to inspire cognitive stimulation leading to a boost in overall brain activity and memory power as well as improved brain processing speed. Improved concentration and a significant reduction in the risk of developing dementia are also reported benefits.

According to Berkeley research, engaging in mentally stimulating activities – such as reading, writing and playing games – may help stave off Alzheimer's later in life. "Brain scans revealed that people with no symptoms of Alzheimer's who engaged in cognitively stimulating activities throughout their lives had fewer deposits of beta-amyloid, a destructive protein that is the hallmark of the disease."

Affirmations: Put simply, affirmations are positive phrases used to reinforce positive beliefs and challenge unhelpful thoughts. Extensive neuro scientific research has been conducted into the link between affirmations and mental health benefits. According to Stanford University researchers Geoffrey Cohen and David Sherman for example, 'affirmations have been shown to decrease stress, increase well-being, improve academic performance and make people more open to behavior change.'