



MENTAL FITNESS

**Your Guide to Proactive Mental Health and
Building a Mental Fitness Routine**

AHMAD JABBIR

First Edition

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Building a Mental Fitness Routine

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ahmadjabbir.com

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DISCLAIMER

This book is not intended to provide medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The content shared is for educational and informational purposes only and is based on personal experience, research, and practical strategies related to mental fitness. It should not be used as a substitute for professional help from a licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, or other qualified health provider. If you are struggling with your mental health, please seek support from a certified mental health professional.



PART 1

INTRODUCTION TO MENTAL FITNESS

IMAGINE...

Imagine you're out with a group of friends for lunch. You're catching up, when you notice one friend starts shifting in their seat and fidgeting with their napkin.

They say: **"I have to admit something..."**

Everyone at your table goes quiet.



Your friend takes a deep breath and nervously shares: "...I have been going to the gym."

One of your friends asks: "What's going on? Are you struggling with your physical health? We're here for you."

Another person chimes in: "I used to go to the gym too when I was struggling with my physical health. I don't need to anymore though since I am better now. I'm sure going will help you too."

In this hypothetical world, people only go to the gym, the yoga studio, or do any form of exercise when they are struggling. But once they're doing better, continuing was seen as optional.

It's hard to picture a world like this, right?

So why do we treat our **mental health** this way? Why do we have to wait until things become overwhelming before addressing it?

Yes, the stigma around mental health has drastically decreased over the past decade or two. But mental health is still not as attractive as physical health... **yet.**

With the current mental health crisis, it's about time we treated our mental health more proactively instead of reactively.

This book is your guide to proactive mental health and becoming mentally fit!

MENTAL HEALTH



Your phone, tablet, and laptop all have a battery. Sometimes the battery is charged at 80% and sometimes you find it in critical condition at 10%.

We can think of our mental health the same way. Our mental health is like a battery and we all have one.

There may be days where we are feeling great and it's like we're fully charged, and other days we are feeling like we're running on low battery.

So just like a phone battery, what can we do to keep our batteries from running out?

MENTAL FITNESS



Chances are: You charge your device as a habit every night before bed.

Sometimes it's at a high 90% because you charged it throughout the day, or it may be at a low percentage. Regardless, you likely don't care what percentage it is and you charge it anyway.

Because why wait until we are only at 1% before we charge our device? We don't need to be reactive.

Mental fitness is the same way. We are exercising our mind and being proactive about our mental health, whether we are feeling great or are struggling. Mental fitness is like the charger.

Like physical fitness, it is still encouraged to exercise whether we are feeling great or not. What if we did that with our mental fitness?

How do I practice **MENTAL FITNESS**?

1

EXERCISE FOR THE MIND

2

DIET FOR THE MIND

...The same way we practice Physical Fitness.



PART 2

EXERCISE FOR THE MIND

HOW TO EXERCISE YOUR MIND

Before you start a workout at the gym, you don't just walk in and start lifting random weights. You first figure out what you want to work on. Maybe it's building strength, improving endurance, or stretching tight muscles. Once you know, you can choose the right exercises.

Your mental fitness works the same way.

If you don't know what's holding you back, it's hard to grow. That's why the first step to change is awareness. You need to identify what's going on in your mind and how it's affecting you.

Some days, you might feel stuck or overwhelmed. Other times, you might struggle with focus, self-doubt, or loneliness.

Just like a gym has different workouts for different muscle groups, this book has different exercises designed to help with specific challenges.

The next page has a chart to help you figure out which area of mental fitness you can work on. It breaks down common thoughts, feelings, and behaviours so you can see what resonates with you.

Once you've identified your top challenge, you can choose from a set of exercises to help strengthen your mental fitness.

Each exercise includes:

- ✓ **How long it takes** (so you can fit it into your day)
- ✓ **How often you can do it** (to build consistency)
- ✓ **The difficulty level** (so you can start where you feel comfortable)

You don't have to do every exercise. Just like in the gym, you get to build your own workout based on what you need. Choose one exercise and do it, even if it's only 5 minutes a day.

Over time, these exercises will help you feel stronger, more focused, and more in control of your mindset.

LET'S BEGIN!

YOUR NEXT STEPS

STEP 1

Pick the challenge you most identify with on the next page.

STEP 2

Go to your challenge's section and pick one exercise.

STEP 3

Commit to it.

5 CHALLENGES

Identify Which Resonates With You

1

“I FEEL BEHIND” 

PAGE 14

2

“I FEEL BURNT OUT” 

PAGE 17

3

“I FEEL LONELY” 

PAGE 24

4

“I CAN'T FOCUS” 

PAGE 31

5

“I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH” 

PAGE 39

CHALLENGE	THOUGHTS	FEELINGS	BEHAVIOURS
1 - "I FEEL BEHIND" 🕒	<input type="checkbox"/> "Everyone else is ahead of me" <input type="checkbox"/> "I'll never catch up" <input type="checkbox"/> "I should be further along by now"	<input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Constantly comparing myself to others <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding tasks because I feel like I won't succeed <input type="checkbox"/> Overloading myself with work but never feeling like it's enough
2 - "I FEEL BURNT OUT" 🔥	<input type="checkbox"/> "I have nothing left to give" <input type="checkbox"/> "I used to care, but now I feel exhausted" <input type="checkbox"/> "No matter how much I rest, I still feel drained"	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally exhausted <input type="checkbox"/> Unmotivated <input type="checkbox"/> Detached	<input type="checkbox"/> Pushing through exhaustion instead of resting <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling numb or disconnected from things I used to enjoy <input type="checkbox"/> Struggling to complete even small tasks
3 - "I FEEL LONELY" 👤	<input type="checkbox"/> "No one really understands me" <input type="checkbox"/> "I feel invisible" <input type="checkbox"/> "I want deeper connections but don't know where to start"	<input type="checkbox"/> Isolated <input type="checkbox"/> Unseen <input type="checkbox"/> Disconnected	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding social situations or interactions <input type="checkbox"/> Hesitating to reach out to others <input type="checkbox"/> Over-relying on digital interactions instead of real-world connections
4 - "I CAN'T FOCUS" 🎯	<input type="checkbox"/> "Why can't I just get things done?" <input type="checkbox"/> "I keep getting distracted, even when I want to focus" <input type="checkbox"/> "I procrastinate too much"	<input type="checkbox"/> Scattered <input type="checkbox"/> Restless <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated	<input type="checkbox"/> Switching between tasks without finishing anything <input type="checkbox"/> Constantly checking my phone or social media <input type="checkbox"/> Struggling to stay present in conversations or work
5 - "I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH" 😞	<input type="checkbox"/> "No matter what I do, it's never enough" <input type="checkbox"/> "I feel like a fraud, and I'm scared people will notice" <input type="checkbox"/> "I have to prove my worth"	<input type="checkbox"/> Insecure <input type="checkbox"/> Self-doubt <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding challenges or opportunities to avoid failing <input type="checkbox"/> Overworking but never feeling satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Criticizing myself more than celebrating progress

1 - “I FEEL BEHIND.”

What’s going on?

Feeling behind can make it seem like everyone else is moving forward while you’re stuck. Your brain constantly compares your progress to others, making you believe you are not doing enough or that you are falling short. This feeling is often fueled by unrealistic expectations, and the pressure to achieve more, faster.

But progress is rarely linear. The idea that you must follow a specific timeline for success—whether it’s in school, career, relationships, or personal growth—is often an illusion. Everyone moves at their own pace. But when you’re caught in comparison, it’s easy to ignore your own progress and only see what others have achieved.

💡 Here’s the good news. Feeling behind is often just a perspective problem, not a reality. You’ve already made more progress than you realize. By shifting your focus to what you’ve gained instead of what’s missing, you can see your growth clearly.

◆ **Common Causes:** Competitive environments, unrealistic expectations, perfectionism, external pressure, and not mindfully recognizing our progress.

◆ **Why It Feels So Bad:** Your brain craves certainty. When you feel stuck with no clear way forward, it can trigger stress and self-doubt.



Exercise #1 - Celebrating Your Effort

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 2 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily

 **Effective for:** Recognizing progress and effort, building self-motivation over time

Instructions

 **Step 1: Write down one thing from today that you'd like to celebrate your effort for**

- Think about one positive thing you did, no matter how small, and even if it didn't get you the outcome you wanted.
 - *"I learned something new," "I exercised today," "I asked a question in class."*
- If you struggle to find something, think about:
 - **A moment of effort** (Did you try something new or push through discomfort?)
 - **A kind action** (Did you help or support someone?)
 - **A challenge you overcame** (Did you stay calm in a tough situation?)

 **Step 2: Read your win out loud (Optional)**

- Saying it out loud helps your brain internalize success and rewire your mindset toward self-recognition.

 **Step 3: Track your progress over time**

- Keep a running list of your wins to look back on when you need motivation.

Exercise #2 - Defining Success

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** Weekly

 **Effective for:** Gaining clarity and living your life more in alignment for the long-term

Instructions

Step 1: Write down your current definition of success in a sentence or two

- Consider what success looks like in different areas of life (career, relationships, personal growth, health) and how you want to feel when you achieve success (fulfilled, excited, peaceful, challenged).
- **Examples:**
 - *Success is having a career I love while still having time for my family.*
 - *Success is feeling fulfilled and challenged in my work, regardless of money or status.*
 - *Success is living with purpose, making a difference, and enjoying the process.*
 - *Success is having strong relationships, financial security, and good health.*

Step 2: Check for hidden external influences

- Read your definition and ask:
 - Is this something I truly want, or is it what I've been told to want?
 - Does this definition bring me peace and motivation, or does it feel like pressure?

Step 3: At the end of each week, ask yourself:

- Did my actions align with my definition of success? Not *all* of your actions might have been aligned with your definition of success, but that's okay. As you go throughout the week, it's normal for there to be ups and downs.
- Did I feel fulfilled and motivated, or did I experience pressure and frustration?
- Do I need to adjust my focus to better match what truly matters to me?
- If needed, tweak your definition or set small course corrections for the following week.

2 - “I FEEL BURNT OUT.”

What’s going on?

Feeling burnt out can make everything feel exhausting, even things you used to enjoy. Your brain is constantly working, but instead of feeling productive, you feel drained, overwhelmed, and unmotivated.

Burnout happens when your energy output is greater than your energy recovery. You keep pushing forward without giving yourself enough time to recharge.

Burnout isn’t just about being busy.

It’s about feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted to the point where even small tasks feel impossible. You might still be showing up, getting things done, and keeping up appearances, but inside, you feel depleted.

💡 Burnout isn’t a sign that you’re weak or incapable. It’s a signal that your mind and body need a reset. By making small, intentional shifts in how you rest, recover, and set boundaries, you can rebuild your energy and feel like yourself again.

◆ **Common Causes:** Overworking, perfectionism, lack of boundaries, constantly saying yes, emotional exhaustion, and neglecting self-care.

◆ **Why It Feels So Bad:** Your brain and body need balance. When you push too hard for too long without rest, your stress response stays activated, making you feel mentally foggy, emotionally detached, and physically worn out.



Exercise #1 - Box Breathing

 Difficulty: Beginner	 Duration: 1 minute	 Frequency: Daily, or as needed
 Effective for: Quickly calming the nervous system and feeling less overwhelmed		

Instructions

The Science of Box Breathing

Think of your body like a car alarm. When stress hits, the alarm goes off, making you feel overwhelmed. Box breathing is a form of "bottom-up processing" which is like using the remote to turn the alarm off at the source instead of just trying to ignore the noise. It tells your nervous system you're safe, slowing your heart rate and calming stress fast.

Step 1: Follow the 4-4-4-4 breathing pattern

- Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 seconds. (Feel your belly expand.)
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds. (Stay relaxed - no tension.)
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds. (Let go of stress.)
- Hold again for 4 seconds. (Feel the calm settling in.)

Step 2: Repeat this cycle for 3-4 rounds (about a minute)

 **Tip:** If you feel comfortable, extend each phase to 5 or 6 seconds as you get better at controlled breathing.

Exercise #2 - 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Walk

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 5 minutes

 **Frequency:** Weekly, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Grounding yourself in the present moment

Instructions

The Science of the 5-4-3-2-1 Exercise

Imagine your mind is like a phone with too many apps running - it's overloaded and overheating. A 5-4-3-2-1 grounding walk is like clearing those apps by shifting focus to your senses. This tells your brain to stop spiraling and tune into the present reality. This helps your body feel safe and calm.

 **Step 1: Find a space that you can pause and focus, whether that's outdoors at a park, backyard, or indoors in your room**

 **Step 2: Walk slowly and focus on your surroundings**

 **Step 3: Use the 5-4-3-2-1 method to engage your senses:**

-  **5 Things You See** → Notice colors, shapes, and movement. This could be trees, clouds, objects in the room, books on a shelf, shadows, etc.
-  **4 Things You Hear** → Listen for sounds around you. This could be birds, wind, footsteps, a clock ticking, conversations, etc.
-  **3 Things You Feel** → Pay attention to physical sensations. Feel the texture of your clothes, the air on your skin, or the surface beneath your hands or feet.
-  **2 Things You Smell** → Breathe deeply. Notice any scents in your space, whether it's fresh air, a candle, food, or even the fabric of your clothes.
-  **1 Thing You Taste (Optional)** → If available, sip a drink or have a bite of a snack.

Exercise #3 - The Energy Saver Matrix

● **Difficulty:** Intermediate

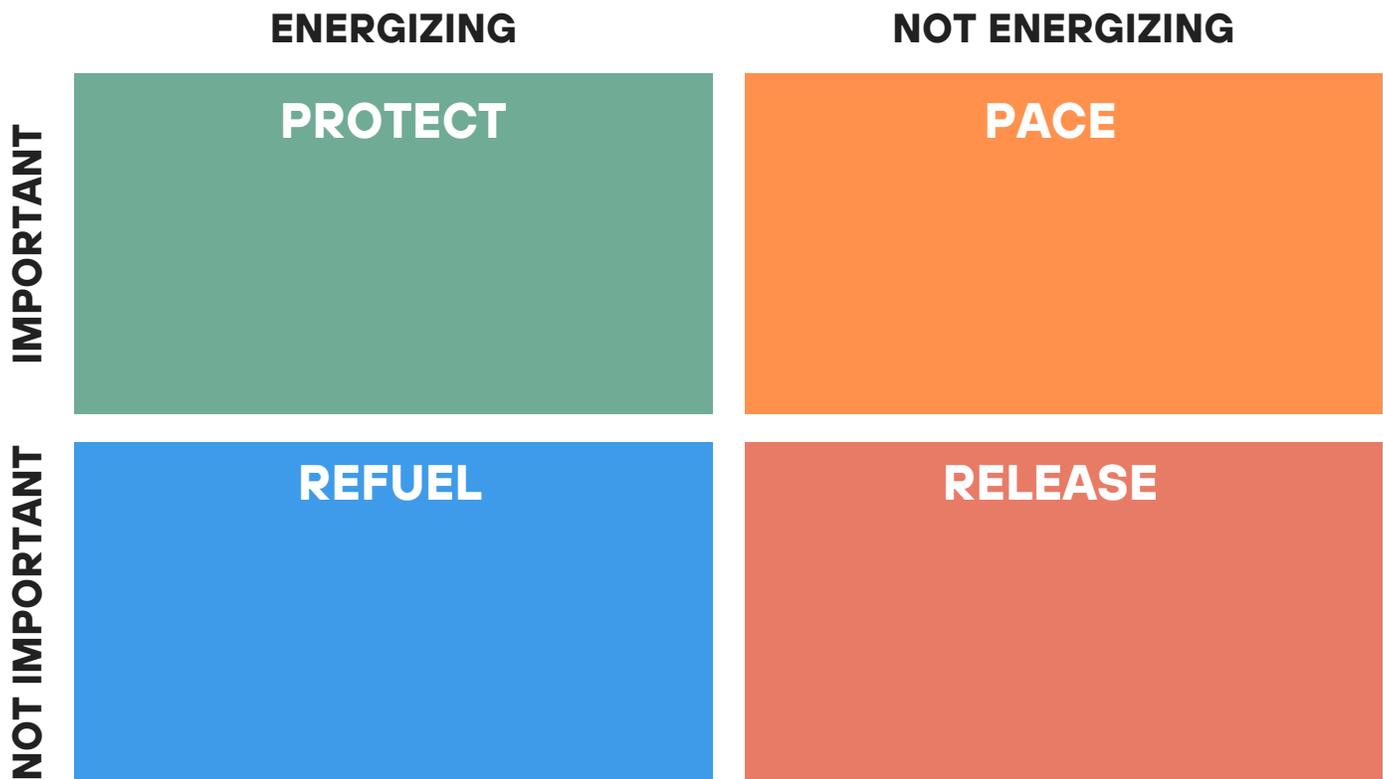
🕒 **Duration:** 15 minutes

🔄 **Frequency:** Weekly

🎯 **Effective for:** Intentionally designing your schedule to better serve your energy

Instructions

📝 **Step 1:** Draw the following diagram on a piece of paper, or print this out



🔍 **Step 2:** Think of the stuff currently using your time, energy, or brain space. Sort each one into the grid

Examples:

- 🔥 Working on a passion project → important, and energizing
- ⚡ Helping a friend through drama → important, but not energizing
- ❄️ Watching a show for fun → not important, but energizing
- 📱 Answering every group chat instantly → not important, and not energizing

🎯 **Step 3: Looking at each box, understand that you can utilize a strategy of Protect, Pace, Refuel, and Release:**

- 🔥 **Protect** (Important + Energizing). These are activities that both matter and fill your tank. These are the things to Protect. Schedule them, prioritize them, and treat them like your emotional oxygen mask.
- 🐢 **Pace** (Important + Not Energizing). You still need to do these, but don't go full-speed. Break them into smaller chunks, take breaks, ask for help.
- 🚰 **Refuel** (Not Important + Energizing). These are the small, enjoyable activities that give your brain a break and help you recharge. Think of them as quick pit stops: not the main journey, but essential for staying on the road.
- 🗑️ **Release** (Not Important + Not Energizing). These are the things that drain your energy and don't actually matter in the big picture, even if it feels urgent. Letting go of these helps you focus on what does matter.

🕒 **Step 4: Look at your Energy Saver Matrix and make one small energy shift today:**

- 🔒 **Protect what matters most.** Example: Say no to a distraction. Block quiet time for deep focus.
- 🐢 **Pace what's important but draining.** Example: Break a big task into smaller steps. Set a timer to avoid burnout.
- 🚰 **Refuel with something that recharges you.** Example: Take a walk, doodle, listen to music without guilt.
- 🗑️ **Release what isn't worth your energy.** Example: Cross off a task that doesn't truly matter. Let go of overthinking.

📈 **Step 5: Test and Reassess**

- Implement your chosen adjustment for at least one week. At the end of the week, revisit your Energy Saver Matrix and adjust again based on what you learned.

Exercise #4 - The Joy List

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** Weekly

 **Effective for:** Reconnecting with joy, and balancing work with fun to prevent burnout

Instructions

Step 1: Write down 10 activities that bring you joy

- Burnout isn't just about doing too much. It's about not doing enough of what recharges you. Identifying joyful activities helps remind you of what fills your energy tank.
- What did you love to do when you were younger?
- What makes you laugh?
- What feels playful and silly to you?

Some ideas:

-  Listening to music and dancing in your room
-  Reading a fun book that isn't for work or school
-  Doing something creative like drawing or painting
-  Playing a video game just for fun
-  Going outside and moving your body (swinging, hiking, playing a sport)
-  Spending time with a pet
-  Watching a comedy or stand-up special
-  Lying down and watching the clouds

Step 2: Schedule 1 joy activity this week

- Put it into your calendar of when and where you'll do it
- Play and joy activate a different part of your brain, helping to reset your stress response and bring back energy, creativity, and motivation.

 **Tip:** If you want to be more playful, you can also write down your 10 activities on slips of paper and create a "Joy Jar." Each week, you can randomly pick one of the slips of paper and do that activity.

Exercise #5 - Leaning into Stress

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** Weekly

 **Effective for:** Reframing stress as a tool for growth, expanding your comfort zone

Instructions

Understanding Stress: Good vs. Bad

Not all stress is harmful! Some stress pushes us to grow (this is called *eustress*), while too much stress for too long can be harmful (*distress*). This exercise will help you differentiate between good and bad stress, and challenge yourself in a way that leads to growth.

Step 1: Think of one time in your life when stress helped you improve

- What was the challenge?
- How did I feel at first?
- How did I grow because of it?
- Write down your reflections. Example: *"Public speaking stressed me out, but over time, I became more confident."*

Step 2: Pick one manageable challenge that helps you grow

- Examples:
 -  Speak up in a meeting or class if you normally stay quiet.
 -   Push yourself in a workout to test your limits.
 -  Make a difficult phone call or introduce yourself to someone new.
 -  Start a project you've been avoiding because it feels intimidating.

Step 3: After completing the challenge, write down what happened:

- How did I feel before, during, and after?
- What did I learn about myself?
- Would I do it again? Why or why not?

3 - "I FEEL LONELY."

What's going on?

Humans are wired for connection. When you feel lonely, your brain doesn't just see it as an emotion. It sees it as a problem that needs to be fixed. In fact, loneliness activates the same areas of the brain as physical pain.

But here's the tricky part: You can feel lonely even when surrounded by people, especially if your relationships feel shallow, forced, or inauthentic.

Loneliness isn't just about being alone. It's about feeling unseen, unheard, or disconnected from the people around you.

💡 Here's the good news. Loneliness isn't a permanent state. It's a signal that you need more meaningful connection. Just like hunger reminds you to eat, loneliness is your brain's way of saying, "Let's find our people."

◆ **Common Causes:** Struggles with fitting in, surface-level friendships, lack of vulnerability, social anxiety, or comparing yourself to others.

◆ **Why It Feels So Bad:** Your brain interprets social rejection as a survival threat, making loneliness mentally and physically painful. Over time, loneliness can lead to self-doubt.



Exercise #1 - Ask Deeper Questions

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 2-60 minutes

 **Frequency:** Any conversation

 **Effective for:** Having better conversations to spark more meaningful connection

Instructions

 **Step 1: Choose one person you'd like to connect with - this could be a friend, classmate, family member, or even someone new**

 **Step 2: Instead of typical surface-level questions, ask something that encourages reflection, storytelling, or emotion**

- Examples:
 - *What's something that made you smile this week?*
 - *What's a challenge you've overcome that shaped who you are today?*
 - *What's something you're excited about right now?*

 **Step 3: Ask a follow-up question based on what they said**

- Example: If they say, *"I love painting,"* you could ask, *"What do you love about it?"* or *"What inspired you to start?"*

Exercise #2 - "I Thought of You"

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 3 minutes

 **Frequency:** Weekly, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Strengthening connections through small, meaningful gestures

Instructions

Step 1: Prompt yourself to think of someone

- Open your phone contacts, social media list, or photo gallery and scroll for a few seconds.
- Pause when you see a name or picture that stands out to you.
- When was the last time I talked to this person? What made me think of them?

Step 2: Send a simple message saying you were thinking of them and why

- Options include:
 - Text message: *"Hey, I saw a picture that reminded me of you today! Hope you're doing well."*
 - Voice note: More personal and engaging than text.
 - Video message: Adds warmth and authenticity.
 - Phone call: If you have time, you could surprise them with a call. Leave a voicemail if they don't pick up.

Step 3: Pair it with gratitude

- If you want to make it extra meaningful, include a small note of appreciation.
 - *"I just wanted to say I appreciate you for always being such a great listener."*
 - *"Thinking about that trip we took last year - thanks for making it so fun!"*

Step 4: Get even more creative (optional)

- Go beyond words by sending them something small but thoughtful:
 - A handwritten card or letter
 - A small gift or treat (their favorite snack, a book, or something that reminds you of them)

Exercise #3 - Give & Pay It Forward

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** Variable

 **Frequency:** Weekly, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Strengthening relationships through small acts of generosity

Instructions

The Science of Giving

Giving isn't just nice, it actually makes you feel better. Helping others releases feel-good chemicals in your brain. It also strengthens relationships and boosts your mood. This exercise will show you how small acts of kindness can make a big impact on your well-being.

Step 1: Pick someone in your life who might appreciate a little kindness today.

Some prompts to help you decide:

- Who has been supportive to you recently?
- Who might be having a tough time and could use encouragement?
- Who do you admire but don't express appreciation to often?
- Who have you lost touch with but still think about?
- Who makes your day better in small ways (a teacher, barista, coworker, classmate)?

Step 2: Decide how you want to give to this person today. Some ideas:

- **Words** – Send a thoughtful text, voice note, or handwritten letter.
- **Time** – Offer to help them with a task, study together, or just check in.
- **Acts of Kindness** – Do something small but thoughtful, like holding the door open or leaving an encouraging note.
- **Gifts** – If you can, give something meaningful (a book recommendation, their favorite snack, or a small surprise).
- **A Shared Experience** – Invite them for a walk, coffee, or a fun activity.

Step 3: Afterward, take a moment to check in with yourself:

- How did it feel to give? Did it shift your mood or energy?
- Did it change how you felt about your connection with this person?

Exercise #4 - The Fear Ladder

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 10 Minutes

Frequency: Weekly

Effective for: Gradually overcoming social fears through small, manageable steps

Instructions

Step 1: Draw a ladder with 10 rungs, or print out this page

- Each rung represents a fear level from 1 to 10. List actions you could take to build connection and rate them on this scale. You can include multiple actions per rung.

Step 2: Pick just one small step (1/10 difficulty) and commit to doing it this week

Step 3: After completing your step, ask yourself:

- How did it feel before, during, and after? Was it as hard as I thought?
- What's my next small step? Keep moving up the ladder at your own pace!

	<p>(10/10) Share a deep fear or dream with someone</p> <p>(9/10) Speak up in a large group setting</p> <p>(8/10) Go to an event alone</p> <p>(7/10) Give a compliment to a stranger</p> <p>(6/10) Ask someone to hang out one-on-one</p> <p>(5/10) Have a short conversation</p> <p>(4/10) Ask a simple question ("How was your weekend?")</p> <p>(3/10) Contribute one comment to a group conversation</p> <p>(2/10) Text someone you haven't talked to in a while</p> <p>(1/10) Say "hi" to a classmate or coworker</p>		<hr/>
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Exercise #5 - Relationship Check-In

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 20 Minutes

 **Frequency:** Monthly

 **Effective for:** Clarifying relationships and making intentional social adjustments

Instructions

 **Step 1: Write down 5-10 people who play a significant role in your life. These could be:**

- Close family and friends
- Coworkers or classmates
- Mentors, teachers, or coaches
- People you see regularly but don't know well (like a barista or neighbor)
- Old friends you still think about but rarely see

 **Step 2: For each person, ask yourself:**

- Do I feel energized or drained after spending time with them?
- How often do I usually interact with them?
- How balanced do I feel this relationship is? Do I give and receive equally?

 **Step 3: Choose one person from your list and take an intentional action to adjust or strengthen the relationship**

- Strengthen: Reach out to a person in your life that energizes you, but you might not see often, and schedule a catch-up.
- Reevaluate: Set healthy boundaries with someone who drains you.

Exercise #6 - Opening Up

 **Difficulty:** Can be challenging

 **Duration:** Variable

 **Frequency:** As needed

 **Effective for:** Strengthening trust and reducing the weight you need to carry

Instructions

Take a moment to think of one person you trust - this could be a friend, teacher, family member, or a mental health professional. Reach out to them and share how you're feeling, even if it's just a small part of what's on your mind.

Professionals are a safe space. It is their job to be there for you. Even CEOs and Olympic athletes work with a therapist to keep their minds sharp, even if they're not struggling.

 **Tip: Turn your What If's into Even If's.** Our "what if" statements can stop us from taking action because of fear. But you can think about how you would respond even if the worst case scenario were to happen. You still have power and it's not the end of the world.

What if...	Even if...
What if I open up about my feelings and they don't understand?	Even if they don't fully understand, expressing myself helps me process my emotions and find people who do.
What if I share something personal and they judge me?	Even if they judge me, I'd rather be honest about who I am than hide my true self.
What if I admit I'm not okay and they don't know what to say?	Even if they don't know what to say, just expressing myself can help me feel lighter.
What if I tell someone I'm struggling and they don't care?	Even if they don't respond how I hope, it doesn't mean my feelings don't matter. There are people who will listen.

4 - “I CAN’T FOCUS.”

What’s going on?

If you’re struggling to focus, it’s not just about willpower. Your attention system constantly filters distractions and prioritizes what feels urgent or rewarding. But with endless notifications, multitasking, and information overload, your brain can struggle to stay on track.

The harder you force yourself to focus, the more resistance you might feel. That’s because focus isn’t just about pushing harder. It’s about reducing mental clutter, managing energy, and creating the right conditions for deep concentration.

💡 Here’s the good news. Struggling to focus doesn’t mean you’re lazy or incapable. Your brain, like a muscle, can be trained to improve attention span. Small, intentional changes to your environment, habits, and mindset can help you regain control over your attention.

◆ **Common Causes:** Mental overload, constant digital distraction, lack of rest and recovery, fear of failure or perfectionism, unclear priorities.

◆ **Why It Feels So Bad:** Your brain craves novelty and quick rewards, making long tasks feel boring. A lack of progress feels frustrating, leading to procrastination and self-doubt. Stress and anxiety hijack focus, making it harder to think clearly.



Exercise #1 - 10-Minute Focus Sprint

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Overcoming procrastination by starting with a small step

Instructions

 **Step 1: Choose a task you've been avoiding or struggling to focus on**

- Set a timer for just 10 minutes. This is short enough to feel doable but long enough to build momentum.

 **Step 2: Give the task your complete attention until the timer ends**

- No distractions. Put your phone on silent, close extra tabs, and create a focused space.
- If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the task without judgment.

 **Step 3: When the timer goes off, ask yourself:**

- Do I feel like continuing? Do I need a short break? Am I done for now?
 - If you're in flow, keep going!
 - If you need a break, pause for 2 minutes, then restart.
 - If you're done, celebrate the small win - even 10 minutes of focus is progress.

Exercise #2 - The Focus Partner Method

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 30 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Staying accountable and improving focus

Instructions

 **Step 1: Choose a friend, classmate, coworker, or study buddy who also wants to get things done**

- If no one is available, try virtual focus groups or online platforms.

 **Step 2: Say out loud what you'll each be working on**

- Example: *"I'll write my report, and you'll finish your reading assignment."*
- Set a timer for 30-60 minutes (or shorter if you prefer).

 **Step 3: Stay engaged in your task while knowing someone else is working too**

- Avoid talking, checking your phone, or multitasking during the focus session.

 **Step 4: Once time is up, take 1-2 minutes to check in with your partner**

- Did you stay focused? What did you accomplish?
- If helpful, repeat the cycle for another round.

Exercise #3 - Box Breathing

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 1 minute

 **Frequency:** Daily, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Quickly calming the nervous system and feeling less overwhelmed

Instructions

The Science of Box Breathing

Think of your body like a car alarm. When stress hits, the alarm goes off, making you feel overwhelmed. Box breathing is a form of "bottom-up processing" which is like using the remote to turn the alarm off at the source instead of just trying to ignore the noise. It tells your nervous system you're safe, slowing your heart rate and calming stress fast.

Step 1: Follow the 4-4-4-4 breathing pattern

- Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 seconds. (Feel your belly expand.)
- Hold your breath for 4 seconds. (Stay relaxed - no tension.)
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds. (Let go of stress.)
- Hold again for 4 seconds. (Feel the calm settling in.)

Step 2: Repeat this cycle for 3-4 rounds (about a minute)

 **Tip:** If you feel comfortable, extend each phase to 5 or 6 seconds as you get better at controlled breathing.

Exercise #4 - The Brain Dump Reset

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** As needed

 **Effective for:** Clearing mental clutter and reducing overwhelm

Instructions

Step 1: Write down everything that is on your mind

- No filtering, no organizing. Just dump every thought onto the page. Include:
 - Tasks you need to do
 - Worries or stressors
 - Ideas or things you want to remember
 - Random thoughts taking up mental space
- Example: "What if I fail my test? I need to email my teacher. Did I pay that bill? Need to buy groceries. Oh, I should text Sarah back."

Step 2: Sort & prioritize (optional)

- Once everything is on paper, review your list and categorize:
 -  Important tasks (things you can take action on)
 -  Lingering worries (things out of your control)
 -  Random thoughts or ideas (can be set aside for later)

Step 3: Take one small action

- Choose one thing from your list that you can act on immediately.
- If no action is needed, simply acknowledge and let go of lingering thoughts.

Exercise #5 - Removing Junk Dopamine

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily

 **Effective for:** Cutting out low-value distractions and training your brain for deep work

Instructions

Step 1: What's the #1 thing that pulls you away from focusing?

- Social media?
- Checking messages constantly?
- Watching short-form videos?
- Mindless internet browsing?
- Write it down. Recognizing it is the first step.

Step 2: Make distractions harder to access, such as:

- Keep your phone in another room while working.
- Log out of social media or use website blockers.
- Use grayscale mode to make your phone less stimulating.
- Delete addictive apps from your home screen.

Step 3: Choose a replacement activity

- Instead of quitting distractions completely, swap them for rewarding activities that still give you dopamine, but in a healthier way.
- Choose one replacement activity:
 - Instead of scrolling, read 5 pages of a book.
 - Instead of checking messages, go for a 5-minute walk.
 - Instead of watching videos, listen to a podcast while stretching.

Step 4: Do a "Dopamine Check-In" after 30 minutes

- How do you feel? More focused? Less restless?
- Did you miss the distraction as much as you thought?
- What will you try next time to keep improving?

 **Step 2: Every emotion carries a message. Once you name your feeling, reflect:**

- Am I feeling overwhelmed because the task feels too big?
- Am I avoiding this because I fear failure?
- Am I unmotivated because I don't see the purpose of this task?

- Examples:
 - If you're feeling anxious, your brain might be saying: *"I'm afraid I won't do this well."*
 - If you're feeling frustrated, your brain might be saying: *"This task feels too confusing."*
 - If you're feeling bored, your brain might be saying: *"I don't see why this matters."*

 **Step 3: Once you understand your emotion, choose one small action to regulate**

- Overwhelmed? → Break the task into tiny, manageable steps.
- Fearful? → Remind yourself that progress matters more than perfection.
- Unmotivated? → Reconnect with why this task is meaningful to you.
- Distracted? → Remove one key distraction for just 10 minutes.
- Then, commit to working on the task for just 5-10 minutes (see the 10-Minute Focus Sprint exercise). Often, getting started is all you need to shift momentum.

 **Step 4: After completing a small step, ask yourself:**

- Did naming my emotion help me move forward?
- Do I feel more in control of my focus now?
- What will I try next time?

5 - “I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH.”

What’s going on?

Feeling like you’re not good enough isn’t just a random thought. Your mind is wired to look for danger, and sometimes that means doubting yourself before anyone else can.

However, self-doubt isn’t always true. It’s shaped by things like past experiences, high expectations, or constantly comparing yourself to others. The more you tell yourself: “I’m not good enough,” the more your brain believes it.

Not feeling good enough is often connected to shame. Researcher Brené Brown explains that shame makes us afraid of being judged or disconnected from others. The more we keep these feelings to ourselves, the stronger they grow. But when we talk about them and challenge them, they start to lose their power.

💡 Here’s the good news. Just because you feel inadequate does not mean you are. Confidence isn’t something people are born with. It is built through action, self-compassion, and reframing how you see yourself.

◆ **Common Causes:** Unrealistic standards, fear of failure, perfectionism, negative self-talk, lack of self-recognition

◆ **Why It Feels So Bad:** Your brain is wired to seek validation and belonging. When you doubt yourself, it can feel like rejection, even if no one is actually judging you. Self-doubt triggers stress and avoidance, making it harder to take action and build confidence. Focusing on what you lack blinds you to what you have already accomplished.



Exercise #1 - Pausing for Self-Compassion

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 3 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily, or as needed

 **Effective for:** Easing stress and strengthening emotional resilience

Instructions

 **Step 1: Think of a stressful situation that is making you feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or self-critical**

- Recognizing your pain without judgment is the first step toward self-compassion. Say out loud or to yourself:
 - "This sucks."
 - "This hurts."
 - "This is stressful."

 **Step 2: Remind yourself that you're not alone**

- Everyone experiences challenges at some point. Say out loud or to yourself:
 - "I am not the only person who feels this way."
 - "Struggle is part of being human."
 - "I'm not alone."

 **Step 3: Offer yourself kindness. Ask yourself:**

- How would I comfort a friend going through this?
- Say a kind phrase that resonates with you:
 - "You are deserving of compassion."
 - "You are allowed to be imperfect."
 - "You are trying so hard, and I see your strength."

 **Step 4: Stay with this feeling of kindness and connection for a few moments**

- Take a slow, deep breath and exhale any tension you're holding.
- Carry this gentle self-compassion with you as you move forward.

Exercise #2 - Daily Affirmation

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 2 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily

 **Effective for:** Building confidence, and reinforcing self-worth

Instructions

Step 1: Choose 3-5 affirmations that resonate with you

- Pick statements that directly challenge feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy.
- Examples:
 - *I am enough just as I am.*
 - *My worth is not defined by achievements or mistakes.*
 - *I am learning and growing every day.*
 - *I am worthy of love, respect, and kindness, including from myself.*
 - *I treat myself with the same compassion I would give a friend.*
-  **Tip:** If these feel hard to believe, add "I am learning to" or "I am working on" in front of them.

Step 2: Say your affirmations out loud

- Stand in front of a mirror or find a quiet space.
- Say each affirmation slowly and clearly while making eye contact with yourself.
- Speak as if you are telling a truth about yourself, even if you don't fully believe it yet.

Step 3: Write them down for reinforcement

- Keep a dedicated page in a journal for affirmations.
- Write your chosen affirmations at least once a day to reinforce them in your mind.

Step 4: After saying or writing your affirmations, pause and notice how you feel

- Did this shift my mindset, even slightly?
- If you don't feel any different, that is okay. Like exercising a physical muscle, it will take time to see results. Keep practicing.

Exercise #3 - Visualization

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 3 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily

 **Effective for:** Mentally preparing for success

Instructions

 **Step 1: Think of a moment where you doubt yourself (a big presentation, a social event, a personal challenge)**

- Imagine yourself handling it with confidence and ease

 **Step 2: Engage your 5 senses to make it vivid**

Sight: Picture the scene clearly

- Where are you? What does the space look like?
- Who else is there? Imagine their facial expressions and reactions.
- What are you wearing? How do you look standing tall and confident?

Sound: Tune in to the sounds around you

- Are people talking? Is there background noise?
- Hear your own voice: steady, strong, and assured.

Touch: Notice physical sensations

- Feel your feet grounded, your shoulders relaxed.
- If you're holding something (a mic, a pen, a handshake), imagine its texture in your hand.

Smell: Breathe in your surroundings

- Is there coffee in the air? Fresh paper? A familiar scent that calms you?

Taste: If relevant, imagine the taste of a sip of water or a breath of fresh air before you begin

 **Step 3: Before facing a challenge, take a deep breath and recall this scene**

- Repeat a power phrase to reinforce confidence:
 - *"I've already seen myself succeed. I can do this."*
 - *"I am capable. I belong here."*

Exercise #4 - Rewriting Your Core Belief

 **Difficulty:** Beginner

 **Duration:** 3 minutes

 **Frequency:** Daily

 **Effective for:** Building positive identity beliefs and rewiring self-limiting ones

Instructions

 **Step 1: Instead of focusing on "I'm not good enough," pick a word that represents the version of yourself you want to embrace**

- Examples: *Great, confident, proud, strong, kind, capable, smart, resilient.*
- If you struggle to believe it now, that's okay. You're training your brain to build this belief over time.

 **Step 2: Complete the sentence: "I am [word] because [action]"**

- Write down 3 actions from today that support this belief, no matter how small.
- Examples:
 - *"I am strong because I pushed through a tough moment today."*
 - *"I am kind because I listened to a friend who needed support."*
 - *"I am capable because I asked a question in class instead of staying silent."*

 **Step 3: Read your list out loud to yourself (optional)**

- Notice how these small moments prove that your new belief is already true in small ways.
- Your identity is built through action. Even small moments contribute to reshaping your self-perception.

 **Step 4: Each day, add new evidence that reinforces your core belief**

- Over time, you will have a long list of proof that challenges your old self-doubt.

Exercise #5 - A Letter to Yourself

 **Difficulty:** Intermediate

 **Duration:** 10 minutes

 **Frequency:** As needed

 **Effective for:** Strengthening self-worth, and creating a resource for yourself

Instructions

 **Step 1: Think of one thing that makes you feel not good enough (appearance, work, relationships, feeling behind)**

- Write it down in as much detail as you would like and notice what emotions come up (frustration, shame, sadness, self-doubt).

 **Step 2: Imagine a best friend who sees your strengths and struggles but still values you deeply**

- Write a letter to yourself from their perspective.
 - How would they reassure you?
 - How would they remind you that imperfection does not make you unworthy?
 - If they encouraged growth, how would they do it with kindness, not pressure?
- Example: *"You are doing your best, and that is enough. A single mistake or flaw does not define you. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to a friend."*

 **Step 3: Read out your letter (optional)**

- Let the words sink in like a comforting embrace.
- Save it and reread whenever self-doubt resurfaces.



PART 3

DIET FOR THE MIND

HEALTHY VS. JUNK “FOOD”

When we think about diet, we usually think about food, like what we ate for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

But did you know that the word “diet” comes from the Greek word *diaita*, which originally meant **a way of life**?

It wasn't just about food. It was about everything you consumed, from the ideas you took in, to the conversations you had, to the activities you did daily.

In the modern world, we can bring this idea back, especially when it comes to mental fitness. Just like you're feeding your physical body, think about what you're feeding your mind.

This includes all the books you read, the social media you scroll, the music you listen to, the shows you binge, and the conversations you have.

Some of this is **healthy brain food** - things that challenge you, inspire you, and make you grow.

Some of it is **junk food for the brain** things that feel good in the moment but leave you drained, distracted, or stuck in comparison.

Category	Healthy Food for the Brain 🥦	Junk Food for the Brain 🍔
Definition	Nourishes the brain, builds mental strength, and improves focus, learning, and well-being.	Feels good in the moment but leads to mental fatigue, distraction, and negative thinking.
Effect on the Brain	Boosts memory, creativity, emotional resilience, and long-term thinking.	Overloads the brain, reduces focus, and increases stress and anxiety.
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reading a thought-provoking book 📖- Deep, meaningful conversations 🗣️- Creative hobbies (writing, drawing, music) 🎨- Meditation and mindfulness 🧘♂️- Intentional social media use (following inspiring creators) 📱🌟	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Doomscrolling for hours 📺- Mindless TikTok or YouTube binges 📺- Social media comparison spirals 😞- Overloading on notifications and distractions 📱💥

Checklist: Is This Healthy Food or Junk Food for Your Brain?

Use this checklist to self-reflect and determine whether what you're consuming is nourishing your mind or draining it like junk food.

✔ Healthy Brain Food Checklist

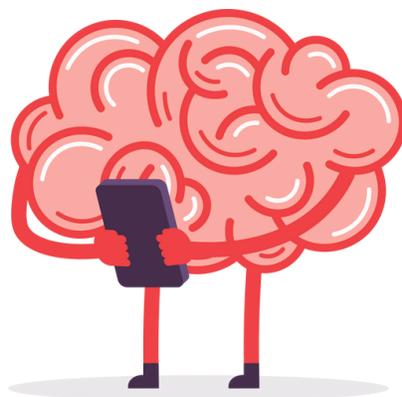
- Does this make me feel inspired, energized, or curious?
- Does it challenge me to think in new ways or expand my knowledge?
- Does it help me build skills, creativity, or emotional resilience?
- Do I feel more focused and clear-minded after engaging with it?
- Does it contribute to my long-term goals or personal growth?
- Would I actively choose to do this again, even if I wasn't bored?

💡 If you checked most of these, it's healthy food for your brain! Keep feeding your mind with things that make you think, grow, and feel good long-term.

✖ Junk Brain Food Warning Signs

- Do I feel drained or distracted after consuming this?
- Am I just scrolling, watching, or engaging with this out of habit, not intention?
- Does this leave me feeling worse about myself (comparison, insecurity, frustration)?
- Does this keep me in a loop of distraction instead of actually doing what matters?
- Is it designed to grab my attention endlessly rather than add value?
- Would I feel embarrassed or regretful if I looked at my screen time report on this?

💡 If you checked most of these, it's junk food for your brain! Try swapping it for a more engaging, meaningful, or uplifting alternative.



DESIGN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

How to Design Your Environment for a Healthier Brain Diet

Inspired by *"Atomic Habits"* by James Clear

Your brain is constantly shaped by what surrounds you. Instead of thinking you need to have more willpower, it's smarter to design your environment intentionally. You can make it easier to feed your brain with what nourishes it and reduce distractions that drain your focus.

Make Healthy Brain Food Obvious (Make good habits easy to start)

- Keep books, journals, or learning materials visible and accessible. (Example: *Put a book on your desk or nightstand instead of your phone.*)
- Join spaces where healthy mental habits are normal. (Example: *A book club, mastermind group, or study group.*)
- Surround yourself with cues that remind you of your goals (Example: *Vision boards, notes to yourself, or a dedicated workspace for deep work.*)

Make Junk Brain Food Invisible (Remove temptation from your environment)

- Move distracting apps off your home screen or delete them altogether. (Example: *Use a black-and-white filter to make social media less appealing.*)
- Set up app limits or website blockers for time-wasting content. (Example: *Use "Do Not Disturb" mode when working.*)
- Keep your phone in another room while studying or working. Out of sight, out of mind.

Make Healthy Brain Food Attractive (Pair good habits with things you enjoy)

- Listen to educational podcasts while walking, cleaning, or commuting.
- Study or read with a favorite drink to make it feel enjoyable.
- Connect learning with social engagement. Discuss ideas with friends, join an online forum, or follow thinkers who inspire you.

Make Junk Brain Food Unappealing (Increase the "cost" of bad habits)

- Set a rule. Before watching YouTube or scrolling social media, read for five minutes first. Often, you won't feel like scrolling afterward.
- Use accountability. Tell a friend your goal, or use apps that remind you of your screen time.
- Shift how you frame distractions. Instead of *"I deserve a break,"* reframe it as *"I don't want to feed my brain junk."*

DEAR READER,

You are a pioneer...

Yes, a pioneer.

Although talking about mental health has become more common, the norm is still that we only talk about it when we are struggling.

You are a trailblazer choosing to change that.

You've chosen to strengthen your mind the way athletes train their bodies, and that choice is not common yet.

You are also joining a list of famous pioneers doing the same as you.

Will Smith used visualization and affirmations to shape his career.

In one quote he shares: *"In my mind, I've always been an A-list Hollywood superstar. Y'all just didn't know yet."*

Lebron James trains his mind through meditation.

In one [video](#), he even said: *"The mind is like a muscle, the more you train it, the stronger it becomes. And while the greats master the body, the greatest master the mind."*



Emma Watson journals every day.

And now,

...YOU

You've taken a step that deserves to be recognized.

Because those who build their mental fitness shape not just their own lives, but also the world around them.

Thank you for being a pioneer.



REFERENCES

Challenge 1 - "I Feel Behind."

1.1 - Celebrating Your Effort

This exercise is partially inspired by *The Gap and The Gain* by Dan Sullivan and Benjamin Hardy. This book explains the psychology behind why celebrating how far you've come is more beneficial than measuring the gap between where you're at now and your goals.

1.2 - Defining Success

This exercise is based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. SDT says that true fulfillment comes from autonomy (defining success on your own terms), competence (improving in areas that matter to you), and relatedness (building deep connections with others).

Challenge 2 - "I Feel Burnt Out."

2.1 - Box Breathing

This exercise is rooted in the ancient yogic practice of pranayama (breathwork) and was popularized by Mark Divine, a former U.S. Navy SEAL and expert in mental toughness. It is now widely used in sports, business, and therapy as a way to quickly regulate the nervous system.

2.2 - 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Walk

This exercise is part of grounding exercises used in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and trauma-informed therapy. It has been particularly applied in the field of anxiety management, PTSD treatment, and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).

2.3 - The Energy Saver Matrix

This exercise is inspired by the former U.S. President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who created the Eisenhower Matrix. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He sorted things into 4 categories based on if they are important/not important, and urgent/not urgent.

2.4 - The Joy List

The exercise is based on research in positive psychology and neuroscience about how joy and play help reduce stress and boost motivation. Scientists like Dr. Barbara Fredrickson (Positive Psychology) and Dr. Stuart Brown (Play Science) have shown that fun activities activate the brain's reward system, making you feel more energized and creative.

REFERENCES

2.5 - Leaning Into Stress

This exercise is based on the work of Dr. Hans Selye, a scientist who studied stress, discovered that some stress (eustress) helps us grow, while too much (distress) can harm us. A related concept of the Yerkes-Dodson Law shows that the right amount of stress can improve focus and performance, but too much leads to burnout.

Challenge 3 - "I Feel Lonely."

3.1 - Ask Deeper Questions

This exercise is based on social psychology and communication science. Psychologists like Dr. Arthur Aron have studied how meaningful conversations increase closeness and trust, while authors like Charles Duhigg explores how great communicators build relationships in *Supercommunicators*.

3.2 - "I Thought of You"

This exercise is based on research in by psychologists like Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Martin Seligman who studied how expressing gratitude and reaching out to others increases happiness and deepens social bonds.

3.3 - Give & Pay it Forward

This exercise is based on research is related to the concept of a "helper's high" which was coined by psychologist Allan Luks. He found that helping others triggers the release of dopamine (the "feel-good" neurotransmitter) and oxytocin (the "bonding" hormone), leading to reduced stress and increased happiness.

3.4 - The Fear Ladder

This exercise comes from exposure therapy and was developed from the work of Dr. Joseph Wolpe, a pioneer in behavior therapy. By slowly increasing exposure to a feared situation, the brain learns that the fear is not as dangerous as it seems.

3.5 - Relationship Check-In

This exercise draws upon the body of research that highlights the importance of strong, meaningful connections, such as the Harvard Study of Adult Development. This study reveals that having meaningful relationships are the biggest predictor of long-term happiness and well-being.

REFERENCES

3.6 - Opening Up

This exercise is based on research in psychology and social connection, particularly the work of [Dr. Brené Brown](#) on vulnerability. Her studies has found that authentic vulnerability is the key to deeper relationships, trust, and emotional resilience.

Challenge 4 - "I Can't Focus."

4.1 - 10-Minute Focus Sprint

This exercise is based on behavior science, particularly the work of Dr. BJ Fogg, a Stanford researcher and author of *Tiny Habits*. Fogg's research shows that small actions create momentum and that starting with a tiny, easy step reduces resistance to getting things done.

4.2 - The Focus Partner Method

This exercise is based particularly on the concept of "body doubling." Originally studied in ADHD research, body doubling involves working alongside someone else and studies suggest that having another person present, even silently, reduces distractions and improves task persistence.

4.3 - Box Breathing

See 2.1.

4.4 - The Brain Dump Reset

This exercise is based on cognitive psychology and stress management research, particularly by psychologist Dr. James Pennebaker who shows that writing down thoughts reduces mental clutter, lowers stress, and improves focus.

4.5 - Removing Junk Dopamine

This exercise is based on the work of Jonathan Haidt (*The Anxious Generation*) and Nir Eyal (*Indistractable*) who explain how digital distractions hijack the brain's reward system and fragment your attention.

4.6 - Feelings Wheel Check-in

This exercise is based on the version of the Feelings Wheel available at FeelingWheel.com, which is inspired by Dr. Gloria Willcox's original 1982 article The Feeling Wheel. The field of emotional intelligence has continued to be expanded by psychologists such as Dr. Susan David, author of Emotional Agility. Her research emphasizes that accurately identifying emotions is the first step to processing them in a healthy way.

REFERENCES

Challenge 5 - "I Am Not Good Enough."

5.1 - Pausing for Self-Compassion

This exercise is based on research around self-compassion, pioneered by figures like Dr. Kristin Neff and Chris Germer. Self-compassion also originates from the Buddhist concept of *metta*, which is Pali for "loving-kindness." This means cultivating a state where we express goodwill towards ourselves and others.

5.2 - Daily Affirmation

This exercise is rooted in Self-Affirmation Theory, developed by Dr. Claude Steele. His research shows that when you repeat positive statements, especially ones that align with what matters to you, your brain starts to believe them.

5.3 - Visualization

This exercise is based on work from Dr. Albert Bandura on self-efficacy and Dr. Richard Suinn on mental rehearsal. Their research shows that when people believe in their abilities and mentally rehearse an action with all five senses, their brain practices it as if it were real.

5.4 - Rewriting Your Core Belief

This exercise draws upon the work of Dr. Carol Dweck's and the concept of a growth mindset. Her studies show that who you are isn't fixed and instead, your skills and beliefs can grow and be re-shaped with effort and persistence.

5.5 - A Letter to Yourself

This exercise is also based on self-compassion and *metta* like Exercise 5.1. One of the ways to practice self-compassion is to imagine how a good friend would treat you if they knew you were going through this situation.

GET IN TOUCH

The thing about writing a book is that you never really know who will pick it up, flip through its pages, and find something that sticks with them.

Whether you want to share your thoughts on the book, ask a question, or just say hello, I'd be thrilled to hear from you. Tell me what resonated, what challenged you, or even how you're applying mental fitness in your own life.

Your feedback, insights, and experiences make this journey more meaningful, and I genuinely look forward to hearing about your experience.

Drop me a note anytime.

Email address:

ahmad@ahmadjabbir.com

If you are looking for a keynote speaker on mental fitness, please visit www.ahmadjabbir.com.



AUTHOR

Ahmad Jabbir is a 2x TEDx and international speaker, having spoken in the U.S., U.K., and Canada. What can become possible when you train your mind and seek discomfort? Ahmad is a living example of this. He's completed a 9-hour mountain race, skydived, and interviewed 100 people across 89 cities and 45 countries.

This journey ultimately led him to his marketing role at Yes Theory, a YouTube channel with over 9 million subscribers, impacting people in over 160 countries.

All of your goals in life can be achieved if you have the right mindset. Let's make mental fitness as common as physical fitness!



@ahmad.jabbir



/ahmadjabbir



ahmadjabbir.com

EDITOR

Richard Lee-Thai is the Founder of Excuses to Connect, a company dedicated to fostering cultures of connection in workplaces, higher education, and communities. His mission is to create a world without loneliness.

A TEDx speaker and co-author, Richard has shared his expertise on the power of human connection with audiences around the world. Richard is also a faculty member at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and Rhodes Wellness College, where he integrates connection-building strategies into learning environments. His work in higher education emphasizes improving student success, staff collaboration, and institutional culture.



@richardleethai



/richardleethai



excusestoconnect.com

MENTAL FITNESS

AHMAD JABBIR

First Edition