



Mental Fitness Training 101

When we hear the word ‘fitness’ we tend to think physical. Being physically fit means, we are taking action and doing things to build up our strength and endurance. It means doing the work to make our body more resilient in sickness, chronic disease, falls, and even aging. Wouldn’t that also be true then for our mental fitness? Our mind also needs us to take action to be mentally fit, to build up our resilience to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Mental fitness is not as easy to achieve as one would know who’s tried to meditate during a commercial.

It takes an awareness first that there’s a disconnect between the mind and body. You can’t be fit in one area and not the other and expect to function fully and long-term.

We go go go all day long at work or a busy retirement. Yet we expect our mind to go go go with us and it doesn’t always, does it? I exercise a lot, as it really is my medicine for physical and mental health. Exercise is a highly recommended action to take to improve your mental state however, focused mind work is also recommended as I have come to discover. A visit to my physician and lab results showed I had out of range high cortisol levels, the infamous ‘stress hormone’. How could that be? I run, I bike, I laugh...I clench my teeth, have trouble sleeping, feel anxious, and I’m depressed. I had’nt put all that together until she finally talked me into this thing called meditation. I thought she said medication and I was all in, until I heard her a second time: meditation. You mean sitting still? You mean thinking of nothing? Are you mad, doctor?!

We can change our thinking patterns. We can strengthen our neural pathways that lead to more positive thoughts and behaviors. Meditation and breathing practice over time actually alters neural pathways. The more we feed our negative thoughts and behaviors, the more likely they will occur. The more we feed our positive thoughts and behaviors the more likely they will occur. This is due to the neuroplasticity of our brain and its ability to change and make new connections. Research has proven that we have an overwhelming capacity to continually rewire our brain throughout our entire life. So, don’t accept for a New York minute when someone you love that is old and stubborn says ‘I’m too old to change’. Think of your neural network like a high school clique. Thoughts that evoke certain emotions cluster together via our neural pathways. This means that every time we allow a negative thought to repeat, it only strengthens itself. The clique of mean girls gets even meaner! Instead, strengthen your neural network with positive thoughts and behaviors and you will soon realize without even realizing it, that you are becoming more mentally fit. You may find that you are more able to handle the same stressors you had yesterday, but today you have a new perception, a new neural pathway, a new outlook.



Check out Headspace: A Guide to Meditation on Netflix!