The Mental Health Gym Playbook

52 Weekly Exercises To Promote Achievement, Happiness
& Well-Being

Dr. Ron Kaiser

Author of
What Can Go Right?
The Thinking Person's Guide to Making Good Things Happen

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The Mental Health Gym Playbook
52 Weekly Exercises To Promote Achievement, Happiness
& Well-Being
by
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Also by Dr. Ron. Kaiser at Smashwords.com:
What Can Go Right?The Thinking Person's Guide to Making Good Things Happen

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1. INTRODUCTION

I'm a fanatic when it comes to health – both physical and mental.

After a half century of working with a broad range of individuals in various settings, I'm convinced of two things: (1) Optimal health is not distributed equally among the population; (2) Regardless of our personal endowments in that regard, we can all do things to maximize our personal physical and mental health.

Nobody seriously doubts that personal decisions about smoking, alcohol, drug use, diet, and exercise can contribute to physical well-being and longevity. As a psychologist, I have committed myself to helping people take charge of their mental health by giving them information that can be transformed into behaviors to promote positive mental fitness.

Last year, I wrote my first e-book, *What Can Go Right? The Thinking Person's Guide to Making Good Things Happen*. It is a positive psychology book that encourages people to take charge of their thinking and behaviors. I have been gratified to hear from those who have used the principles and exercises contained in the book to make dramatic positive changes in their lives.

Around the same time as I wrote the book, I established my website: www.thementalhealthgym.com. The website features various avenues of information – including blogs and podcasts. A popular weekly feature of the website is a Mental Fitness Exercise. I now have 52 of them, and this book offers a compilation of them in one place, arranged in a workbook format so that you can add your own input. In this way you can effectively guide your continuing mental fitness.

Every author needs a support system during the process of transforming an idea into a book. I'd especially like to thank Bill O'Hanlon and Sandy Beadle for their encouragement , guidance, and technical expertise in bringing *The Mental Health Gym Playbook* to fruition.

In addition to dedicating this book to my family – Libby, Brian, Jeff, Krista, Sofia, and Matt – I dedicate it to the many patients who have bought into my concept of mental fitness and have experienced personal growth. Through their interactions with me, they have not only helped me maintain my own arguable level of mental fitness (such as it is) but they have also made me extremely proud of the influence that I've had upon them.

2. MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL FITNESS

Health has historically been defined in a somewhat neutral manner as the absence of disease. Mental health professionals have essentially followed suit. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV-TR) serves as the working bible of the mental health professional – listing lots of different mental illnesses but no real index of mental health. The best description available to the mental health professional using the DSM for describing a patient is "No Diagnosis" rather than something that affirms a positive state of mental health.

In 1946, the winds of change started appearing on the health care horizon when the World Health Organization (WHO) issued the definition of health as being, "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Since that time, we have seen the emergence of practitioners of holistic and alternative medicine as well as more traditional physicians who emphasize nutrition, exercise, stress management techniques, and habit control to help patients not only maintain their present state of health but also improve upon it.

In 2005, the WHO defined mental health as, "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community".

Positive psychology is the branch of psychology most attuned to the to the notion of going beyond overcoming illness to emphasize the importance of thriving; essentially going beyond neutral into drive. In his most recent book, *Flourish*, positive psychology's leader, Martin Seligman, defines well-being as the hallmark of mental fitness. He has defined five elements of well-being to which he has assigned the mnemonic, PERMA: positive emotion; engagement; positive relationships; meaning; and accomplishment.

Readers of my book, *What Can Go Right?* and those who visit my website, http://www.thementalhealthgym.com know that my emphasis is on the Type P Personality – a healthy personality whose behaviors overlap some of Seligman's concept of PERMA – the 5 P's being: personal goal-driven; positive; proactive; persistent and playful. I also include physical fitness as a major contributor to mental health. I use the term, mental fitness, to describe the lifestyle commitment to consciously striving for one's optimal mental health.

This Playbook is designed to provide you with exercises to help you overcome some of those habits, thoughts and behaviors that may be impacting upon your achievement of optimal mental health while helping to reinforce those practices that are helping you to stay emotionally healthy. These are exercises that have been designed so that each can be practiced over the course of a week – with the expectation that at least some will be maintained over the course of a lifetime, especially if we can maintain a positive and playful attitude and not treat behavior change as if it is hard work.

LET'S START PLAYING!

3. HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

You will quickly notice that this is not a typical book. It looks more like a workbook, but I call it a playbook – to build upon the gym theme of my website - http://www.thementalhealthgym.com, and also to emphasize that getting emotionally fit should be thought of as fun rather than work. I have to admit, though, that some of the exercises may not seem like that much fun until after you've accomplished and benefitted from them. But that's sort of what happens at a regular gym too.

If you do the exercises in order, you will find 52 weekly mental fitness activities designed to be roughly adaptable to the calendar year and the seasons in the northern hemisphere. They certainly don't have to be done in order, and it makes sense to modify them depending upon where you live. Obviously, an exercise that pertains to spring cleaning that occurs relatively early in the book won't make sense for you at that time if your spring doesn't occur until later in the year.

There are a few exercises that are timed to roughly coincide with events in the United States, such as Independence Day and the tax-filing deadline, which may not be occurring at the same time in your country. Most of the world however, can relate to these concepts and deal with them at some time during the year.

Wherever you live, I encourage you to review the exercises and then jump around to do them in any order that makes sense to you. Some may choose to start by first doing the easiest ones or the ones that will have the greatest perceived benefit for you. I do not, however, regard compulsively following the format to be an index of mental fitness – so please feel free to creatively use the book in a way that will be most beneficial to you. In a few cases, you will find an exercise that is closely related to an earlier one but with a subtle difference to encourage continued practice and reinforcement of an important mental fitness skill.

Please use the space that intended for your comments so that it truly becomes your mental fitness handbook. I have deliberately avoided a lot of detail when describing the exercises. Bring your planning and experiences into play to add the details.

Some of you may find it helpful to print out the pages and write on them (possible in some versions,) while others may be more comfortable putting their individualized notes and comments into the computer.

My informal polling has suggested that, as people review the exercises, most of them find that they are doing about 1/3 of them already on a regular basis. They generally consider another 1/3 to be either irrelevant or unimportant for them. But most people find 14-15 exercises that can be important cornerstones or adjuncts to personal development. In some cases, they may not have thought about these activities in any organized fashion, and in other cases this list of exercises has provided a structure for committing to activities that may have already been occurring on an occasional or haphazard basis.

I will consider this book a success if it causes you to think about what you can do improve your own mental fitness, if it gives you some ideas for doing so, and if it causes personal behavior to change in a positive direction.

4. THE FITNESS EXERCISES

Now you are ready to embark on the journey to improved mental health and fitness. The actual Playbook occurs on the following 52 pages. Commit yourself to staying with the process, and you are certain to be successful in making mentally healthy changes while having fun doing so.

THE MENTAL HEALTH GYM PLAYBOOK

MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #1

Start the year by getting in the habit of practicing gratitude. Each night, before you go to bed, identify something from that day for which you are grateful. It will make even the lousiest day seem a little better.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #2

During the holiday season, it is sometimes appropriate to sacrifice discipline for fun in some areas. By now. however, make certain that you have returned to a comfortable level of structure in your life – with respect to financial management, diet, exercise, family time, and other habit behaviors.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #3

If you don't have a wake-up routine that permits you to ease into the morning, start one now. Allow a few minutes to deal with unplanned circumstances such as a broken shoelace or near-empty gas tank. Feeling overwhelmed at the start of the day tends to carry over for several hours or longer. If you need the extra few minutes of sleep, go to bed earlier.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #4

Let's attend to nonverbal behavior this week. Pay attention to eye contact, avoid slouching, and walk with a self-assured gait.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #5

Identify a challenge that you have been avoiding. Re-label it as an opportunity, and recognize the benefits that you will gain by accomplishing it. Now go out and confront it.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #6

Surprise somebody this week with an unsolicited and out-of the-ordinary act of kindness.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #7

Before taking it as a personal attack if you feel like you've been wronged, think of alternative explanations from the other person's point of view. Sometimes you will indeed be treated unfairly – BUT IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT YOU.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #8

Make this an appreciation week. Look for opportunities to give special thanks when deserved to sales clerks, waiters, taxi drivers, and others who provide good service for us. Showing well-deserved appreciation will make both of you feel good.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #9

Good nutrition is part of both physical and mental fitness. Familiarize yourself with the current guidelines for healthy eating at www.choosemyplate.gov. It's an easier system to understand and follow than the old nutritional pyramid.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE #10

If you live in the United States, tax-filing day will soon be here. If you haven't begun to organize your papers in preparation for filing, start doing so this week.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE #11

It's time to review your New Year's resolutions. Take pride in the ones you've kept. If you've gotten sloppy about some, give yourself a booster shot of encouragement – or readjust them in a more realistic way.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #12

Look for humor in every day situations. You will be surprised at how often you will find opportunities to laugh. Remember the particularly funny ones so that you can use them as conversation fillers in the future.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #13

Spring cleaning has both physical and psychological benefits. It insures a healthier environment and promotes the idea of starting over and changing unsatisfying circumstances and behaviors. If you haven't begun spring cleaning, make this the week to do so.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #14

Make this a week to ensure that you are being fair to yourself. Don't blame yourself for negative outcomes that are not your fault. Somebody else could be at fault or nobody could be at fault. Sometimes lousy things happen without anybody being at fault.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #15

April is Stress Awareness Month. Be particularly alert to signs of stress this week – and then implement stress management techniques. If you don't know any, various resources are available – including The Mental Health Gym website: http://www.thementalhealthgym.com.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #16

Whenever you set goals, write them down. The physical act of writing, and the tangible record that it produces, makes it more than a casual act. It is a behavior that increases the likelihood of goal-achievement.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #17

Take time out for pride. Each evening, recall something that you accomplished that day (it doesn't have to be big or dramatic) –and take time to appreciate yourself for it. Make the sense of pride an ongoing part of you as you approach future endeavors.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #18

A healthy environment contributes to both physical and mental health. Follow up Earth Day by incorporating more environmentally friendly practices into your repertoire of behaviors.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #19

The days are getting longer and warmer. Build more outdoor activities into your physical fitness regimen.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #20

Think of TECHNOLOGY as your friend. It can contribute to personal growth and an expansion of your knowledge. Don't be afraid of it. Learn one new computer skill this week – even you know a lot about computers already.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #21

Disagreements are a normal part of living. If you are challenging someone's opinion or behavior, however, do so with respect and thoughtfulness – and without bringing up old issues that have nothing to do with the current disagreement.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #22

Take 5-10 minutes during the course of the day and interrupt the stress cycle by doing slow and relaxed breathing, meditation, or visualization of a relaxing scene.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #23

When you are facing a difficult task and are inclined to say, “I can’t,” try saying, “I won’t”. It will help you to take responsibility for your decisions and help you to realize how much control you have over your approach to situations – at least some of the time.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn’t particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I’m going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #24

Read a personal development or self-help book. If you are a regular follower of The Mental Health Gym philosophy, read something that is written from a different perspective. Being open to a range of ideas and experiences is part of mental fitness.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #25

Hot weather increases the risk of dehydration. Drink sufficient amounts of water to maintain your health and mental alertness.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #26

Everybody has some bad habits in the ways that they think and/or behave. Since this is near the time of the year when Americans celebrate their independence, make this a time when you establish your independence from at least one counterproductive habit. Move forward without it – no matter where in the world you live.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #27

In order to establish and achieve more goals, make daydreaming a part of your life, and take time out for it. Just don't make it all of your life.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #28

Avoid boredom in your physical fitness regimen by learning and adding a new activity this week. It can be as informal as brisk walking or stair climbing on a regular basis or it can be a gym-based activity like swimming or taking a yoga or pilates class. More variety increases the chances of maintaining the physical fitness component of mental fitness.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #29

Humans make mistakes. You are certain to make at least one this week. When you do so, learn from it so you don't repeat the same one – and then move on.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #30

Enjoy stress-free meals this week. Make food the center of your table. Background music and pleasant conversation are OK – but avoid TV, phone calls, texting, loud music, arguing, or major problem-solving during mealtime.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #31

Plan for future successes, and then visualize them. Take a few minutes each day to close your eyes and experience the achievement of your goals.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #32

Avoid catastrophic thinking. When you find yourself worrying about what can go wrong, remind yourself that you are not a fortune teller – and don't forget to consider what can go right.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #33

Everyone can make at least one healthy dietary change. Make this the week to do so.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #34

Remember those plans that you made at the beginning of the summer? Are there still things that are left to do around the house and yard? Are there day trips that you haven't gotten around to taking yet? Re-commit to completing your summer plans while the weather is warm and there is lots of daylight.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #35

If someone disappoints you, assertively express your disapproval of the behavior without disapproving of the person.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #36

Practice active listening when conversing with others. Focus on what the other person is saying rather than on what you will be saying next. When you are really listening, it doesn't take long to come up with a response – so you don't have be planning one while the other person is talking.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #37

Even those of us who are task-oriented need some distractions. Pleasure reading, movies, TV, and spectator sports all fit the bill if they are done in moderation. If you haven't already done so, build some diversions into your schedule.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #38

Organized charities depend on us so that they can help others. This week, pick one out and either volunteer or provide an annual or special financial contribution. Every type of assistance is important, and you will feel good by doing good.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK # 39

The seasons are changing, and summer is ending in the northern hemisphere. Pick out at least one category of summer items, such as clothing, tools, or toys. Store the items that you will use next summer and discard or donate those things that won't be needed in the future. There is no downside to having less clutter in your house or garage.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #40

Do two types of relaxing activities during the day: something active (like stretching or taking a walk at a comfortable pace) and something sedentary (like meditating or visualizing a relaxing scene). Neither has to take long and both types of activities are stress-relievers. Start out three times a week and work up from there.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #41

Everybody has some unfinished projects on their desk or around their house or yard. Some are unfinished because they are not of high enough interest or priority. Select one of those, and make a conscious decision to forget about it. Give yourself permission to move on with your life without carrying plans for that project around with you.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #42

Take time to get out and enjoy nature. This should be especially easy for those of us who live in places where the seasons clearly change and the leaves turn colors at this time of the year. Wherever you are, however, you can take advantage of reasonable weather and sufficient daylight to appreciate the world around us.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #43

Do not waste time in toxic relationships. Assess whether you are in romantic, friendship, or business relationship that is draining you, and take steps to move on.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #44

Make some time for laughter every day. If your family and friends don't supply enough humor, find it in books or humor websites or YouTube videos or by watching the Comedy Channel or funny movies. Humor helps keep you balanced. Keep track of particularly funny jokes or stories that you hear so that you can spread laughter to others.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #45

Find opportunities for SAVORING. Become immersed in the experience of enjoying interactions with good friends, sitting in front of a fireplace, or intensifying the experience of anything else that is meaningful and enjoyable for you.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #46

As we enter the holiday season, plan a strategy for keeping eating and drinking behaviors under control.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #47

Shorter days and cooler weather limit some of the natural physical fitness activities that can take place during the summer – such as gardening, yard work, and taking nature walks. Identify some indoor or colder weather fitness activities that you can enjoy doing, and make them a part of your winter lifestyle.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #48

Ruminating about unimportant things is a major waste of time. If you find yourself over-thinking about minor complaints, decisions that have already been made, or perceived slights or disappointments, put those things behind you. Move on to new dreams and challenges and achievements and other important things.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #49

A friendship can die a passive death when neither party puts forth the effort to maintain it. Then it becomes easier to continue doing nothing. Change that pattern this week by rekindling a relationship with someone you care about but just haven't contacted in a long time.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #50

When facing a new challenge or activity, don't become immobilized by over-thinking. There is a lot of wisdom in that Nike commercial. If the motivation is there, and the consequences aren't potentially dangerous or catastrophic in some other way, JUST DO IT!

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK #51

In reviewing the past year, don't forget to take pride in your accomplishments. Do so even before you identify areas for self-improvement for the future.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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MENTAL FITNESS EXERCISE FOR WEEK # 52

Set yourself up for success next year. Make your New Year's resolutions meaningful but also realistic, manageable, and measureable. Grandiose plans that are not attained won't put you as far along the road to success as will small steps that you will actually be able to achieve.

Check the number of the statement that best applies to you.

1. _____ I already do a similar exercise.

2. _____ This exercise isn't particularly exciting or meaningful to me.

3. _____ I'm going to include this exercise in my mental fitness routine.

Notes about your plans and experience in doing this exercise.

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5. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Now you've done it! You have completed a years worth of mental fitness exercises. I suspect that some of you didn't take a year to do it, and some of you probably cheated yourselves by not trying at all.

For those of you who incorporated some of the exercises into your lifestyle, I suspect that you learned a couple of important lessons. First of all, it's not that hard to make a few healthy lifestyle changes. Equally important is the fact that the rewards stemming from those changes are enormous – whether they involve reduced stress levels, healthier eating habits, improved interpersonal relationships, a commitment to exercise, or greater inner-peace.

Now comes the hard part: MAINTENANCE OF GAINS. If everybody who joined a gym continued to work out on a regular basis, most gyms would have an inadequate supply of space and equipment. If everybody who ever quit smoking continued to stay nicotine-free, the tobacco companies would be out of business. And the same issues apply in the mental fitness realm.

There are lots of professionals providing good psychotherapy, and there are a lot of well-written self-help books. Yet, too often people who make significant emotional progress fail to maintain their gains.

This playbook has been designed to overcome the maintenance problem. By focusing on small chunks of behavior for a week at a time, it has provided a model for building mental fitness. Hopefully, you have found five or ten or fifteen fitness activities that you have made a regular part of your behavior repertoire rather than just being a week-long curiosity. If that has been the case, I encourage you to continue to use these fitness exercises and to reinforce their continued use by writing about them. Have a special computer file or keep a notebook and write about particular breakthroughs or rewarding situations or unanticipated pitfalls that you've had to address. Writing about your mental fitness activities makes them more concrete and you will be less likely to let them passively fade away.

You also may have noticed that this book did not exhaust the range of fitness changes that can be addressed. Writing for a general audience, I tried to highlight fitness activities that might affect the largest number of people. Everybody has individual activities and areas to change. It might involve habit behaviors – such as smoking, drinking or drug use. It might involve family dysfunction, issues of honesty, or work-related stress. It might involve living a healthier life style through dietary changes and exercise or it might involve your relationships with others.

The behavior change approach through weekly fitness exercises is not a system that is patented or licensed. If you have found it to be helpful in making some changes, please apply it to other areas of your life. Make up your own weekly fitness exercises and continue your personal growth and development in a positive direction.

As a psychologist, I do want to close with an additional message of importance. Change is more difficult for some people than others because of a variety of reasons. Some people have had histories marked by abuse, trauma, or loss. Others are dealing with self-esteem issues, learning difficulties, health problems, and other extraordinary challenges. Reading a book can help, but don't be afraid to ask for professional guidance to assist you in leveling the playing field so that you can increase the chances of becoming increasingly emotionally fit – which will enable you to benefit even more from the fitness exercises.

In conclusion, I hope that this book has served as a catalyst to help you to recognize that emotional fitness is attainable, sometimes with the professional help of others, but all of us are capable of playing a major role in making ourselves more mentally fit. It just takes motivation, a little bit of extra effort, and the willingness to do some things differently in order to change in a positive direction.

About the Author

Ronald S. Kaiser, Ph.D., ABPP, author of *What Can Go Right? The Thinking Person's Guide to Making Good Things Happen*, lives and works in the greater Philadelphia area where he is a psychologist in private practice and psychological consultant to the Jefferson Headache Center. He is also adjunct associate professor in the Department of Neurology at Jefferson Medical College and serves on the medical staffs at both Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and Methodist Hospital. He can be reached at his website: www.TheMentalHealthGym.com.