

GUIDE

How to incorporate mental fitness in your workplace



A new way of looking at mental well-being

The state of mental health in the workforce

The last five years have brought about a seismic shift in our awareness and understanding of our workforce, what employees need, how they feel, and how they want to thrive at work. More organizations are investing in employee well-being, especially for mental health, and recognizing the importance of caring for and adding value to their employees’ lives. Even with this progress, 71% of HR professionals say their benefits programs aren’t fully utilized¹, and only 35% feel their efforts effectively support mental health.²

As mental health continues to be a top priority, the call to action is clear: Businesses must shift from reactive approaches to proactive strategies for health and well-being. This transformation involves both organizational infrastructure changes and individual mindset shifts.

Enter “Mental Fitness”

Mental fitness encompasses a blend of activities, habits, and attitudes that contribute to emotional well-being. Just as physical fitness requires regular exercise to prevent health risks, mental fitness maintains emotional

equilibrium. Just like we all are mindful of our heart health, dental health, and overall health, mental fitness is about preventive and proactive habits we can build and nurture over time.

Recognizing the interplay between an individual’s mind and body is crucial. By encouraging a mindset of resilience through daily habits, you’re not only helping employees prevent the onset of health issues and decreasing absenteeism, but you’re also showing them that you care about their overall well-being.

Where to go from here

When team members see their company cares for them, they’re three times more likely to be engaged at work and 36% more likely to thrive in both their professional and personal lives.³ You’ve already made an investment in workforce well-being by offering benefits. Now, let’s increase the value and maximize your resources.

Use this guide to cultivate mental well-being in your company. The payoff? A healthier, more engaged workforce and vibrant company culture.

Employees who believe in their employer’s concern for their well-being are⁴:



69% less likely to job hunt



71% less likely to experience burnout



5x more likely to promote their company as a great place to work

Evaluate your ecosystem

Your first step in cultivating a proactive ecosystem in your company is to take inventory. What resources, offerings, benefits, or other tools do you have available for your employees? Once you've taken full inventory, you're ready for the next step.

Here are questions to reflect on, not just as a leadership team but also with the input of your employees, employee resource groups (ERGs), business resource groups (BRGs), and others who may have vital input on these questions. Also, take into consideration any survey results or relevant data.

Availability of benefits and employee offerings:

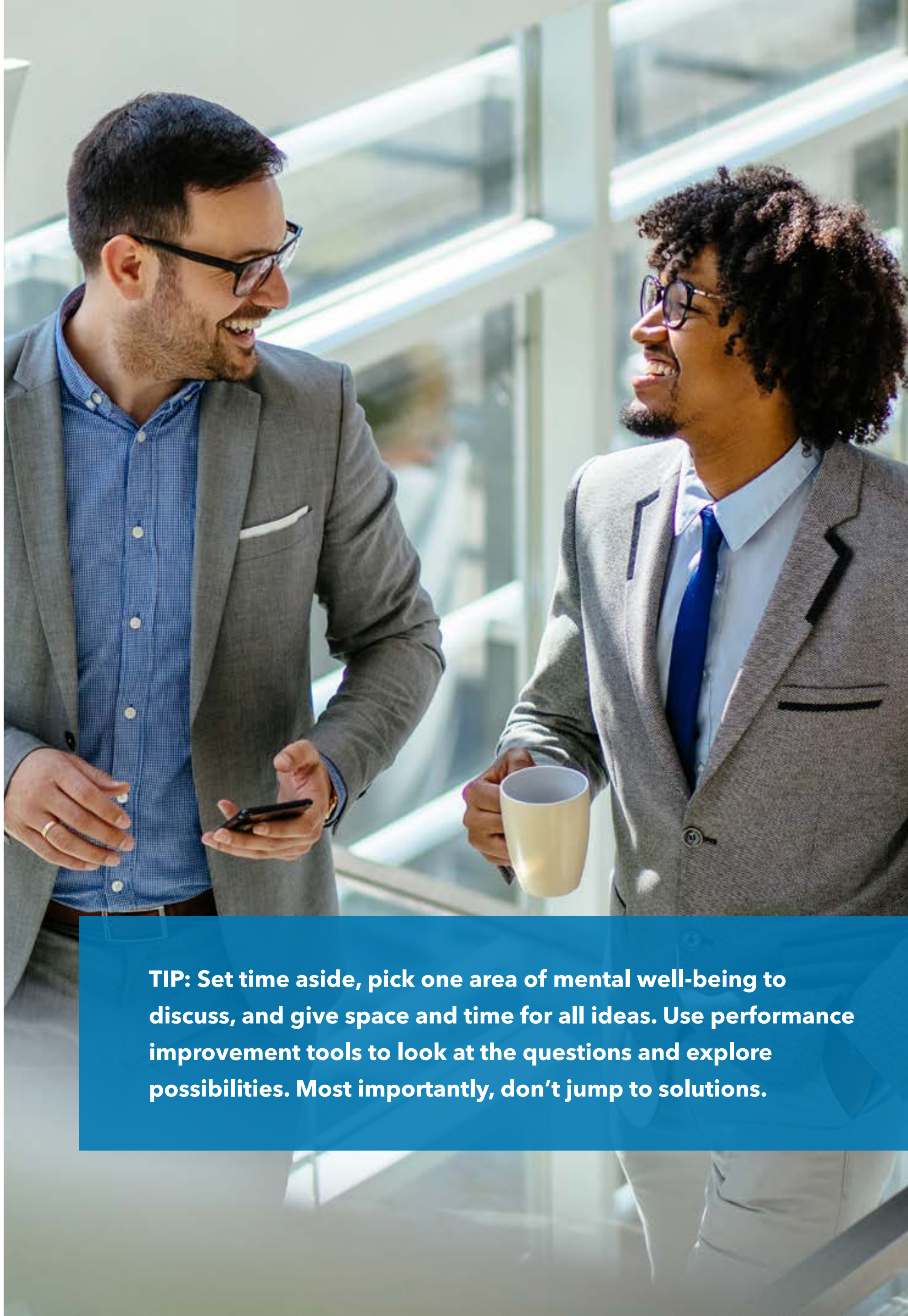
- How are our programs meeting the changing health needs and trends of our employees?
- How inclusive are our benefits and where are there gaps in our offerings – including varying demographics, backgrounds, and needs?
- How can we increase the utilization of resources?

Promotion of and ease of locating offerings:

- How is our company promoting the use of employee benefits?
- How easy is it to find information on benefits? How have we established wayfinding in our organization or through external websites? What are the potential barriers?
- In what ways does our working environment either help or deter our efforts?

Employee offerings in the workforce:

- How are our wellness activities integrated into daily work routines and workflows?
- How are our leaders actively participating in and advocating for these initiatives?
- How are we using employee feedback about benefits and resources to improve our offering?

A photograph of two men in business attire standing on a modern balcony with glass railings. The man on the left is wearing a grey blazer over a blue button-down shirt and glasses, holding a smartphone. The man on the right is wearing a grey blazer over a white shirt and a blue tie, also wearing glasses and holding a white mug. They are both smiling and looking at each other, engaged in a conversation. The background shows a bright, modern building interior.

TIP: Set time aside, pick one area of mental well-being to discuss, and give space and time for all ideas. Use performance improvement tools to look at the questions and explore possibilities. Most importantly, don't jump to solutions.



Activate your prevention ecosystem with mental fitness

After evaluating your strategy and identifying areas for growth, let's move toward nurturing your prevention ecosystem. This step introduces a crucial shift: Embracing mental fitness as a cornerstone of total health, grounded in the understanding that caring for the mind is caring for the body.

Mental fitness combines physical, mental, and social health, turning regular habits like eating well, getting enough rest, practicing mindfulness, and building strong social ties, into powerful tools for resilience.

It's about giving your team the strength to face challenges, reduce stress, and thrive.



92%

of workers prefer employers who prioritize their mental well-being.⁵

Introducing the mental fitness gym

The “R’s” of the mental fitness gym

Just like regular weight-lifting to build physical strength, mental fitness takes consistent habits to build resilience – the “muscle” you’re working out in your mental fitness routine.

Visualize a gym designed for increasing resilience, where every resource and amenity represents a component of mental fitness.

	Resourcing and role-modeling
	Routine
	Relationships
	Rest and Reflection
	Recognition

Resourcing and role-modeling

[The gym equipment and trainers]

Similar to how a gym has various weights, machines, or trainers placed at optimal locations, think about how you can effectively organize and communicate the diverse tools in your benefits portfolio for greater accessibility and engagement.



Why?

Resources and visible commitment from executives are key to promoting a culture of mental well-being.

Action:

Position benefits prominently in internal communications. Enable managers to champion the use of these benefits. Bring in peer-to-peer support, ERGs, BRGs, mental health first aid, and employee assistance program (EAP) training for support.

Examples:

- Partner with EAP to highlight different features (coaching, apps, financial counseling, etc.) on a monthly basis.
- Designate a section on your company’s internal portal for “Leadership Wellness Journeys,” incentivizing managers to discuss the advantages of caring for both the mind and body.
- Leverage ERGs or BRGs to share available mental health resources and tools with their members.
- Promote self-care apps or other resources available through EAP or health plans with positioning about features that can help build habits around mental fitness.



Foster well-being:

[Discover 4 Steps to Better Employee Mental Health & Wellness](#)

Inside the mental fitness gym: Continued



Routine

[The workout schedule]

Like a gym’s daily classes, establish routines that reinforce the importance of mental exercises like mindfulness and stress management techniques.



Why?

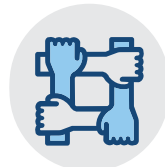
Consistent practice strengthens mental fitness, just as regular workouts enhance physical health.

Action:

Foster small, habitual changes that your employees can easily integrate into their workday.

Examples:

- Implement a policy that encourages meetings to end 5-10 minutes early for mental breaks between back-to-back meetings.
- Launch “Walk-and-Talk” meetings, promoting discussions or one-on-ones to occur while walking.
- Start meetings with a quick breathing exercise or a stretch.
- Encourage employees to set computer reminders for stretch breaks.



Relationships

[Gym community]

This is akin to the camaraderie found in a gym, where the goal is nurturing an atmosphere where positive interactions are the norm.



Why?

Supportive relationships foster a network that increases individual resilience.

Action:

Promote small, sustainable changes that promote healthy interaction and open communication.

Examples:

- Encourage an “Open Door” policy for managers that includes scheduling regular check-ins, giving employees clear opportunities to voice concerns and share successes.
- Offer training for managers on how to create [psychological safety](#) within teams.
- Implement [a mental health training program](#) to educate employees on the importance of mental health as part of total health.

Inside the mental fitness gym: Continued



Rest and reflection

[The cool-down area]

Take a moment to reflect every day on things that have come up, and allow for folks to reflect openly and safely in your organization without jumping to conclusions.



Why?

Recovery is vital for sustainable health; employees need opportunities to restore their mental energy, just as athletes need rest.

Action:

Create structured time-out initiatives that endorse emotional health and support work-life balance, preventing burnout.

Examples:

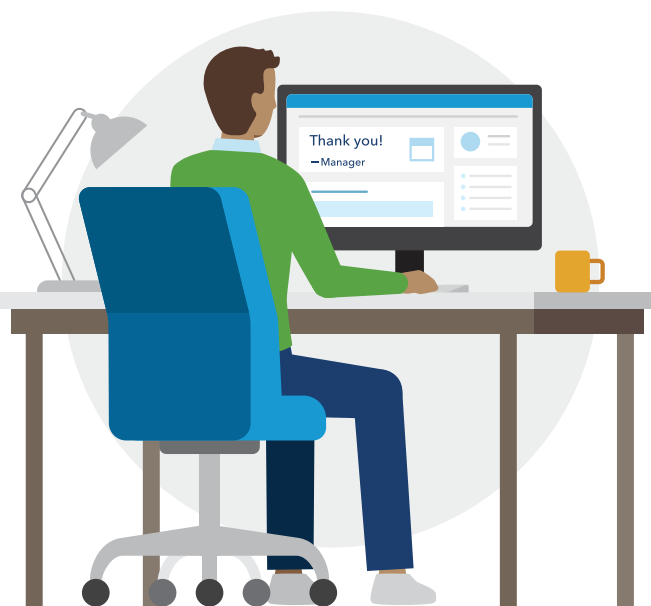
- Introduce flexible work policies that allow time for appointments.
- For in-office or hybrid employees, designate a “Quiet Space” in the office where employees can go to relax or take a breather.
- Try designating meeting-free times, like Friday afternoons, or even for a whole week once a quarter.
- Set clear expectations about working outside of hours or tips on how to avoid work creeping into home life for remote employees. Advocate for sleep hygiene.



Recognition

[The results board]

It’s about acknowledging progress and victories in mental fitness, mirroring a gym’s celebration of physical milestones.



Why?

Recognition fuels ongoing participation and engagement.

Action:

Implement programs that celebrate healthy achievements.

Examples:

- Create a “Gratitude Board” in a prominent office location or on a digital platform, where employees can post notes expressing appreciation for their colleagues’ support, kindness, or accomplishments.
- Implement a “kudos” feature within internal communication tools for spontaneous recognition.
- Conduct employee satisfaction surveys and share results and next steps for improving the work experience.



Unwind and Sleep Well:

[Rest and Revive Sleep Management Toolkit](#)

Employee voices matter

To truly change the culture of your workforce, it's important to institute ongoing opportunities for employees and members of your organization to give feedback.

When it comes to mental health and well-being, this is no exception. You may already be using feedback collection tools like taking pulses, using a scorecard, or having a way for your teams to leave comments and suggestions on how to improve.

By collecting feedback and looking at overall ratings and evaluation scores, you have important information that may guide you in closing the gap between available resources and their use, while improving your employees' well-being and ability to do their work to the best of their ability.

Here are a couple of areas to consider if you're just starting or looking to incorporate more specific questions about mental health, well-being, and employee benefits.



Participation and use rates:

Look at both health plan and EAP utilization and reporting to better understand what services people use and how usage changes over time.



Employee experience and well-being:

Leverage any evaluation tools that can take a pulse on employee engagement and well-being to gain feedback about how your team feels about your wellness initiatives and organizational culture, and note any changes in self-reported mental well-being.



Continuous improvement:

Use anonymous feedback tools to help make sure every member of your workforce feels supported. Use this data to tweak your approach, increase inclusivity, and make organizational changes. Don't be afraid to try something new and adjust as you get feedback.



The path forward

We hope this guide has shown you that mental fitness and a prevention ecosystem aren’t just concepts, but practical frameworks you can implement.

By prioritizing mental fitness, encouraging proactive participation in initiatives, and measuring the outcomes, you’re paving the way for a healthier and more present workforce.

Your dedication not only makes your team more resilient – it makes your company a magnet for top talent and improves retention.

Here’s to building a preventive ecosystem that makes a difference in your employees’ lives and your company’s success!

Below are a few more helpful resources to give you extra insights for fine-tuning the strategies in this guide:

Reduce Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace ▶
Finding Balance Stress Management Toolkit ▶
Mental Health in the Workplace – and the Cost of Staying Silent ▶



About Kaiser Permanente

Kaiser Permanente has been providing high-quality health care and coverage for more than 75 years. By connecting care with coverage, we pioneered a new model for health care, where things are designed to work together – and help our members thrive. Our care model enables our teams to think and work as one, coordinating your care seamlessly, so you don't have to – and delivering better care when it matters most.

When employees receive care from a Kaiser Permanente doctor, every visit is captured through their electronic health record, so their doctor can use their health history to inform their care. If they need to see a specialist, important information about their health is accessible before they even arrive.

Having a good health plan is important. So is getting high-quality care. Kaiser Permanente was built to give you both.

To learn more about our health plans call 855-925-2994.



Endnotes

1 “Maximizing Employee Benefits Utilization: Challenges and Solutions,” Forrester Research study by bswift, March 2024, bswift.com/insights/maximizing-employee-benefits-utilization-challenges-and-solutions/.

2 “2023-2024 SHRM State of the Workplace Report,” SHRM, April 2024, theaawa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-2024-State-of-the-Workplace-Report.pdf.

3 Jim Harter, “Percent Who Feel Employer Cares About Their Wellbeing Plummet,” Gallup, March 2024, gallup.com/workplace/390776/percent-feel-employer-cares-wellbeing-plummets.aspx.

4 See note 3.

5 “2023 Work in America Survey,” American Psychological Association, May 2024, apa.org/pubs/reports/work-in-america/2023-workplace-health-well-being.