

FATPOKE



**NEXT  
LEVEL  
FITNESS**

# FATPOKE

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# Introduction



## What is the purpose of this eBook?

The feeling of stagnation or being ‘stuck in the mud’ is the single largest drain on motivation that researchers have identified.

Many gym-goers find themselves in this position - they enjoy working out; they’ve made good progress; but at a certain point they hit a wall. They get stuck in a plateau.

Usually one of two things will happen at this point - either they gradually stop showing up, or they just keep on going through the motions.

This book will serve as a guide for the third and less travelled option - how to break through plateaus, take your fitness to the next level and actually achieve your goals.

It’s easy to think we can rely on sheer will to do this - for example, by just training harder and more frequently - but, in reality, this is a naïve approach and can only take us so far.

In fact, training is only one variable in a much larger equation. Taking your fitness to the next level often requires that you start building new habits both inside and outside of the gym. This book will cover both.

## How does it work?

The book is divided into three sections. In part one, *Direction*, we explore the topics of motivation and goal-setting. The key idea is that if you know where you’re trying to go, you’ll likely get there quicker and more efficiently.

By structuring your goals around your interests, it will be easier to sustain the necessary motivation, keep yourself accountable and revitalize your enthusiasm if you’re in a rut.

In part two, *Priorities*, we turn our attention to time management. We only have a certain amount of time to dedicate towards fitness, so it’s important that we prioritize the most effective actions on the path towards our goals.

Here, we discuss the value of incremental progress; the difference between ‘feeling productive’ and ‘being effective’ and the importance of building a lifestyle that will support us.

Finally in part three, *Expectations*, we expand on how having the ‘right’ mindset will allow

you to shape healthy standards for yourself, ensuring you stay consistent, get more done in the long-run and, overall, further enjoy the process.

To do this, we outline *'The 5 Pillars of Progress'* - key training principles that will ensure you're moving in the right direction. We then differentiate between realistic and unrealistic expectations and, finally, note the importance of continuous course-correction.

## **Who is it for?**

*Next Level Fitness* is for the ambitious gym-goer; the fitness enthusiasts who are looking to challenge themselves further and who take pride in achieving their goals.

If you're here, it probably means that you already enjoy training, you've already seen some results, but there's more you'd like to achieve.

It may be because you're currently in a plateau - going through the same repetitive motions, following the same old workout routine and not seeing much growth - or it may be because you'd like to refine the direction you're headed, further consider your motivations for working out and decide on some new and exciting goals.

To get the most out of this book, it's important that you follow through with the suggested exercises as these will create a gameplan that you can begin to execute on. By committing to these exercises, you're committing to thinking about your own situation - that is, where you are now and where you'd like to go.

This is half of the battle. Many people stay in the same position simply because they haven't thought of another.

Abraham Lincoln once said, *"Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."* Think of your commitment to this book as you sharpening the axe.

# Part 1. Direction

**While there is no universal ‘right’ way to work out, this section is about finding the right way for you. If you’re trying to take your fitness to the next level, it’s important to know what that level actually is. The great thing is, you get to decide.**

It all starts with motivation. If you’re not motivated to take your fitness to the next level, it probably won’t happen. Luckily, motivation has a formula - though it will require thinking and planning on your part.

In this section we touch on a few key ideas from Steven Kotler’s latest book *The Art of Impossible*. The general idea is that by mapping out your interests and finding links between them, you increase your motivation and can find more appropriate goals. In turn, you’ll be more likely to pursue these goals and, as a result, more likely to achieve them.

Essentially, the task is to clearly define your ‘what’ and ‘why’. Though it may sound cliché, this is important for three main reasons:

1. If you know where you’re trying to go, you will likely get there quicker.
2. If you know what you’re working towards it’s easier to stay consistent with the small (perhaps less exciting) steps along the way.
3. Lastly, if you know why you’re trying to get there, you’re less likely to be derailed by setbacks.

These ideas become particularly important in the intermediate stages when progress has started to slow and perhaps your initial motivation for working out no longer carries the same weight it once did.

Ideally, this is the time to refine your direction.

## Mapping Your Interests

Generally speaking, if we’re interested in something we’re more likely to devote time to it and it’s easier to stay motivated. For this reason, it’s worth considering our different interests in fitness, to build a strong foundation under our training.

One way to do this is to start by writing a list.

This may sound like a trivial suggestion but, by physically writing down your interests,

you're forced to actually think about them. This often leads to a greater sense of clarity - a better idea of what's important and what's not.

If you're already into fitness it means you already have your reasons for working out. But, to take it to the next level, we must now expand upon them and personalize them.

This is the first and, in many ways, the most crucial step as it will lay the foundation for all that is to come.

Research suggests that there's a strong relationship between hand motion and memory\*, meaning you're better off with either a physical book to write in, or by printing off and filling out 'The Blueprint' that we've attached at the end of this document - it lists all the necessary exercises with space to write your answers.

## Action 1 - Interests

**List the areas of fitness you're interested in/curious about. The idea is to strengthen your motivation by finding your own personal reasons for improving, so be specific. Yes, we'd all like to feel good and look good, but it's important to make these ideas personal to you.**

**What would you like to do in your life? How can fitness help you with this? What sort of training are you interested in? From there, look for links between the topics.**

For example, you might be interested in the relationship between neurocognitive aging and cardiovascular fitness; or the flexibility required for advanced calisthenics movements; or how to optimize your diet for muscular endurance.

Perhaps, you'd like to get into rock-climbing and you're interested in finding a training routine that will help you develop the necessary strength and endurance; or maybe you're curious about how regular exercise affects your performance at work.

There might be new areas of fitness you'd like to explore, like learning a martial art. Or perhaps you're interested in helping others get in shape. Whatever it is, write it down..

The idea is that, in finding different links between the topics, you create a stronger foundation of motivation - essentially, you find more reasons to pursue your goals and this changes the neurochemistry in your brain (check out *The Art of Impossible* for more on the science behind this).

\*Timothy J. Smoker, Carrie E. Murphy, and Alison K. Rockwell, "Comparing Memory for Handwriting versus Typing," Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting 53, no. 22 (2009): 1744-47

# Three Types of Goals

With your interests laid out, you're in a better position to now decide on relevant goals. By setting goals, you have to actually consider what it is you'd like to achieve. This is important because it gives you a sense of purpose – again, a direction you'd like to move in.

Researchers have found that simply setting goals can increase motivation and enhance performance by 11-27%\*. They also suggest that big goals trump small goals, meaning we accomplish more if we set out to do more.

That said, big goals aren't helpful alone. Since their attainment will require a lot of time and effort, it's important that we have smaller milestones to reach for and keep us motivated along the way.

For this reason, we advise that you create a list of goals over three different timeframes.

1. **Long-term goals:** These are the ones that will require the longest engagement, taking 3+ years to achieve.
2. **Medium-term goals:** These are goals you'd like to accomplish within 6 months to a year.
3. **Short-term goals:** These are daily/weekly goals that, over time, will amount to your larger ambitions.

## Action 2 – Direction

Now's the time to set your long-term goals. These will build on the interests you've laid out in the previous section and give you a direction to move in.

Don't hold back here - these are your biggest fitness goals; the ones that you'd like to someday achieve. Research suggests that we accomplish more if we set out to do more, so don't worry if they sound unrealistic right now - creating more realistic milestones will come next.

If you have more than 5, categorise them by importance - number each goal with a (1) (2) or (3). We will tackle the most important first, in 'Action 3'.

By setting goals that are both measurable and specific, it becomes much easier to pave out a route and you get a much better gauge as to whether you're headed towards them or not. For example, If you're into calisthenics and your goal is to do a handstand push-up, there's

\*Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, Goal Setting: A Motivational Technique That Works! (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: prentice-Hall, 1984), 75

no ambiguity as to whether you've hit the target or not.

## Hearing From Others

Once you've got your long-term goals laid out, you need to find out what the smaller steps are in achieving them. These will directly influence your medium and short-term targets.

In the modern world, information is everywhere. Thanks to websites like YouTube and Reddit, finding practical and applicable information has never been easier. Hearing from others is one of the best ways to further your own training and it's also great for providing inspiration.

Without hearing from others, it can be difficult to decide on the most effective course of action. This is where you have to be proactive and look for the information you need.

Content creators pour thousands of hours into documenting their lives and sharing what they've learned. Once you've got a clear set of goals in mind, you ought to take advantage of this and hear from them. This will help to streamline the process.

## Action 3 - Milestones

**With your long-term goals laid out, the next task is to reverse engineer them - i.e. to break them down into smaller chunks. If you're not sure what these are, now's the time to do some research and get a clear understanding.**

**These smaller chunks will become your medium-term goals (i.e. goals you'd like to accomplish within six months to a year).**

When writing out your goals an important question to ask yourself is: "If this took twice as long as I'm planning for, would that be ok?" It can be easy to fall into the mindset of 'more is better' and 'quicker is better', but 'too quick' can often come with an unforeseen cost, such as injury or burnout.

# Part 2. Priorities

**Improving your level of fitness usually comes down to improving the quality of your exercise, diet or sleep. However, not all action is equal - the goal of this section is to help you become more strategic in deciding *which* habits to prioritize and implement, based on where you're at and the things that you'd like to achieve.**

With a direction in mind, the next task is to allocate our time effectively so that we can take consistent action towards our goals. We do this, firstly, by familiarising ourselves with The Slight Edge principle (based on Jeff Olson's book under the same name).

Essentially, we must learn to see the value in small, incremental progress and change the way we think about simple everyday actions. As Olson writes: *"Consistently repeated daily actions + time = unconquerable results"*.

On top of this, it's important we learn to differentiate between 'feeling productive' and actually 'being effective'. It's important we assess our weaknesses/limitations and, from there, decide on a plan of action to make time for what's truly important.

To do this, we'll need to look further than just our gym-routine; we'll need to take a look at our lifestyle as a whole to better understand where our time is going and where we'd like it to go.

## The Slight Edge Principle

*"Most people don't stick with the simple daily disciplines it takes to get to where they want to go, because they don't know how to look ahead far enough along the curve to see the results they are creating." - Jeff Olson, The Slight Edge*

Our lifestyle is really just the set of habits that make up our day-to-day life. Most of our time goes to a few things that we repeat over and over.

In repeating them over and over, they add up.

Therefore, accomplishing your goals is simply a case of having the 'right things' adding up. To do this you have to align your lifestyle (i.e. your set of daily habits) with a larger vision.

The key is not in making giant leaps (as these are not sustainable), but in taking small, consistent steps which gradually pave the way to your desired outcome. Since the steps

required are small, they are easy to do, but just as easy not to do. As Olson writes, “*Mostly they’re just little things you do every day and that nobody else even notices.*”

For example, this might mean taking the time to meal prep when you’re already cooking dinner; properly warming up your rotator cuffs before working out; prioritizing the mundane yet effective exercises, etc. These are all easy things to do, but just as easy not to do.

As Olson writes, you have to learn to “*see through the eyes of time*”; you have to see the value in taking a small step. Once you understand this idea, you need to make sure you’re prioritizing the right exercises in the gym and the right habits in your life. Again, we need to make sure it’s the *right* things that are adding up.

## Productive vs. Effective

The Pareto principle (or 80/20) rule suggests that 20% of our actions account for 80% of our results - meaning, as long as we get that 20% right, most of our work is done. But we *do* need to get that 20% right.

Essentially, we want to determine what’s *actually* important and what’s not.

This is where many people struggle, as they tend to build their training plans around their existing strengths and, in turn, further neglect their weaknesses. The issue is that our goals often require that we address our weaknesses. As the saying goes, what got you here won’t get you there.

For example, an intermediate weight-lifter may benefit more from another style of training, rather than more of the same.

The ‘all-or-nothing’ perfectionist may need to learn to settle for a ‘less-than-perfect’ workout if his high standards are preventing him from being consistent.

The aspiring calisthenics athlete may need to focus on building greater flexibility and mobility if he’s already built adequate strength.

To address this issue, it’s important that we look for the exercises that will give us the largest ‘return on investment’. As a good rule of thumb, these tend to be the exercises we know we should do but that we keep avoiding or training second to the ones we’re already good at.

Essentially, you have to look for what’s missing in your current routine. By failing to tackle what’s most important, you inevitably slow down your rate of progress and, as we mentioned earlier, this has its toll on your motivation.

## Action 4 – Training

Decide on, then rank the most effective actions or exercises to prioritize in your training. By clearly stating them, you know which are the most important to be working on.

Essentially, you want to determine what the ‘non-negotiables’ are - the exercises that you *need* to train in order to reach your medium-term goals.

Again, if you’re not quite sure, now’s the time to do some research and find out.

## Making Lifestyle Changes

Just as becoming more effective in your training is important, so is making sure the other key areas in your life are conducive to you achieving your goals. To do this you have to look critically at yourself and your current situation and get a clear picture of your current lifestyle.

## Action 5 – Lifestyle

Consider which aspect of your fitness needs addressing most (your training, diet or sleep) - choose just one to change initially. From there, create a weekly target for this area and/or a daily to-do list if applicable. These are your short-term goals.

This could mean setting a target of how many times per week you’d like to train; how many hours of sleep you’d like to aim for per night; or how many calories you’d like to consume per day.

For example, you may notice that on days where you’re underslept, actually getting to the gym is far more difficult than on the days you feel rested. Perhaps the best habit to focus on in this scenario is to get better sleep.

In order to implement realistic, long-lasting change, we must first understand where our time is going and for what reasons.

By writing a list of daily activities and prioritising them all, it becomes far easier to see where you’d like changes to be made. We often don’t realise where our time’s going until we actually take a look.

Some typical daily activities include:

- Sleeping
- Working/studying
- Using your phone
- Cooking/eating
- Streaming content
- Other hobbies
- Hanging out with friends/family
- Commuting
- Exercising
- Shopping
- Going to events

This is the key to being effective – if we’re clear about what is most important to us, we can plan our time to get that stuff done first. If everything is a priority, nothing is.

If you set a target to get better sleep, you need to consider what’s keeping you up late - is it more important to you than your fitness? Can it be done at a different time in the day?

Similarly, if it’s your diet that’s holding you back, then where does researching meals, shopping, cooking and eating fall in your list of priorities?

Always look for the low-hanging fruit. What’s the first step you need to take to get closer to achieving your goals?

If you’ve committed to eating better quality/more food, perhaps the first step is just to spend a few minutes of your downtime checking out some easy recipes online.

Don’t expect change to be easy and don’t be disheartened if you slip back into old ways - it’s all part of the process (more on this in *Part 3*).

## Action 6 – Integration

Map out what your typical day looks like; i.e. where your time goes and in what order the activities typically unfold in. By taking the time to assess the importance of each activity, it will be easier to see where you can move things around to pursue your short-term goals.

With your day mapped out, decide on 2-3 small changes that'll make hitting your short-term goals more likely. Keep in mind that replacing or modifying an existing habit is far easier than creating a new one.

For example, if you have a short-term goal to stretch twice a week, perhaps you could mix that into an already existing routine (e.g. if you're watching Netflix late at night); or you could start by purchasing a yoga mat.

If you're bulking and trying to eat more calories each day, you might make a point to not skip breakfast (maybe making it the night before); to buy food which is easy to snack on whilst you work/study; or make a high-calorie shake as a post-dinner dessert.

Journaling is an extremely overlooked habit - it's a great way to keep yourself accountable and consistent. One way to use a journal is to create a daily to-do list to help you better organise your time. This can also be done on your phone, either with notes or voice memos.

# Part 3. Expectations

**Healthy expectations are the essential foundation on which we ought to build our lifestyle and training. In this section we expand on key mindset principles that will allow you to *actually* execute on your gameplan.**

**Ultimately your results will depend on how much time you're willing to dedicate towards fitness - both training and all the various lifestyle habits that go alongside it.**

If you've followed the previous exercises, you should now have a clear idea of your interests in fitness; a list of goals over three different timeframes; a better idea of the areas you ought to prioritise in order to reach those goals; and a better idea of the daily activities competing for your time and attention so that you can schedule accordingly.

The final task is to equip yourself with the 'right' mindset that will allow you to successfully execute on your gameplan and one that, in general, better lends itself to the process of improvement.

To do this, we'll first cover '*The 5 Pillars of Progress*' - these are five crucial values to prioritise, both in your training and when it comes to making lifestyle adjustments.

From there, we'll discuss the importance of realistic and healthy expectations. The key idea is that any sort of improvement is both a gradual process and a personal one. This means, if you're looking to see significant results, you'll have to accept this, learn to love the small progress and learn to drop the habit of unhealthy comparison.

## The 5 Pillars of Progress

Healthy expectations are grounded in good principles. Here are five to bear in mind as you approach your training and make any adjustments to your lifestyle.



### Consistency

You've heard it before and you've heard it for good reason: consistency is key. Achieving any goal is simply a case of putting in the reps, over and over again.

Therefore, at any level of training, consistency should always be the primary focus. A good program and hard work are both important but they won't do much for you if you quit. The same goes for diet, sleep, etc.

Anything you're doing consistently, you're likely to be improving at in some regard. For that reason, the focus should be on finding a rate you can consistently keep up. Over time, as you improve, you'll be able to take on more.

Remember, it's better to be consistent with a little than inconsistent with a lot.

This doesn't mean lowering your standards - rather it means taking your time in getting to wherever it is that you'd like to go, for the sake of *actually* getting there. This is particularly true if you're approaching fitness as a hobbyist rather than a professional.



## Patience

Alongside consistency, you must cultivate a greater degree of patience. Focus on gradual, sustainable improvement and you'll go pretty far. Focus on immediate results and you'll probably get carried away – think injuries, think burnout.

You have to learn to trust the process and be ok with not seeing immediate feedback. If you're consistent (and your approach is effective) the results will be there in the end. When it comes to changing your lifestyle/building new habits, don't bite off more than you can chew.



## Recovery

When you're committed to the long-haul, you don't care about missing a day here and there. If you've been consistent in showing up and patient with your expectations, taking a day to rest when something feels off (or you just don't feel like training) isn't an issue.

Don't buy into the idea that working hard means resting less – it's the opposite. Pushing in one direction requires equal force in the other. You can choose to consciously sustain this balance or you can learn this the hard way.

More often than not, insufficient rest will lead to lower quality workouts which will then lead to less motivation on your part, less consistent effort, and ultimately, worse results.



## Quality > Quantity

By lifting with your ego you're doing your future self a disservice. Using bad form may get you a few more reps today, but usually at the cost of better reps in the future. Those extra reps might make you feel like you're killing it in the moment – but they could also mean a week off if you need more time to recover.

Again, we're looking to be effective - not looking to just feel productive. To reach our long term goals, we must place quality over quantity. Take pride in your ability to perform

movements well and, in the case of your lifestyle, in building habits that will last.

Prioritise what you've decided is the most important - meaning, make sure that is what gets done well and what gets done first.



## Progressive Overload

Incremental progress. That's the key to improving. Progressive overload is about gradually increasing the strain on your body so that it's forced to adapt and come back stronger, faster etc.

When it comes to lifting, for example, we can do this in four main ways:

1. By increasing the weight on our lifts.
2. By increasing the number of reps or sets in our training.
3. By increasing the work density (i.e. performing more sets in a given time frame)
4. By performing exercises at a slower/faster rate.

Again, with lifestyle changes, it's the same. Don't expect to do too much at once - instead, go slow to later go fast.

Find ways to challenge yourself ever so slightly. In turn, this will become a habit – you'll always be looking for small ways to improve and it'll show in the results you achieve.

## Expectations vs. Reality

It's important to note that progress is not linear and we often oscillate between periods of high engagement and periods of low engagement when tackling our goals. This all depends on where we are in life and what else is going on.

Fundamentally, if we recognise this inevitable cycle, we can learn to better manage our expectations and make more sustainable progress over the long-haul. It's easy to plan for a best case scenario where we wake up feeling motivated and energized, but as we all know, this isn't always the case.

Recognise that, many times, when you're watching people online, you're watching people at the top of their game. This isn't to say that you shouldn't strive for great results, it's simply to acknowledge that, if you'd like to see similar results, you'll have to put in a similar amount of time and make a similar amount of sacrifices.

It's also to highlight that, for most of us, this doesn't need to be the case. There's a good chance that you have big goals outside of fitness and so it's unlikely you'll be able to

perform at the same level as someone who's dedicated their career to it.

It's easy to get a skewed perception of the process when you're only seeing a glimpse into someone else's life.

## Closing Thoughts

Taking your fitness to the next level requires that you become more strategic with your lifestyle and training. There are a lot of people who are frustrated by a lack of progress and yet, simultaneously, unaware of what progress they'd like to make.

If you're interested in something you're more likely to devote time to it and it's easier to stay motivated. For this reason, you ought to create goals that *you've* actually chosen and *you're* actually interested in achieving.

The key is not in making giant leaps, but in taking small and consistent action towards them. Make a habit of looking for what will give you the largest 'return on investment' - both in your training and in your lifestyle.

If there's one thing you should take away from this book, it's that gradual and consistent improvement will take you much farther, in the long-run, than short and sporadic bursts of motivation. Learn how to cultivate motivation (especially in the beginning) and then be strategic about designing your lifestyle in a way where doing the 'right' things becomes easier and easier.

In the end, fitness is a long-term, personal endeavour and one that you'll have to continuously refine as the circumstances in your life change. Progress is not linear. Times change, people change, you will change, your goals will change - this is all fine and to be expected.

However, if you can make a habit of always coming back to, redefining and clarifying your goals, you'll be much more likely to make the progress you're after and achieve the things that you'd like.

## Further Reading

Many of the ideas in this eBook stem from (or draw inspiration from) a variety of other books which we've enjoyed and listed down below.

- Aubrey Marcus, *Own the Day, Own Your Life*
- Ben Greenfield, *Boundless*
- Carol Dweck, *Mindset*
- Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*
- David Goggins, *Can't Hurt Me*
- Jeff Olson, *The Slight Edge*
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*
- Robert Greene, *Mastery*
- Steven Kotler, *The Art of Impossible*
- Walter Mischel, *The Marshmallow Test*



# The Blueprint

FATPOKE

## Action 1 - Interests

List the areas of fitness you're interested in/curious about. The idea is to strengthen your motivation by finding your own personal reasons for improving, so be specific. Yes, we'd all like to feel good and look good, but it's important to make these ideas personal to you.

What would you like to do in your life? How can fitness help you with this? What sort of training are you interested in? From there, look for links between the topics.

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## Action 2 - Direction

Now's the time to set your long-term goals. These will build on the interests you've laid out in the previous section and give you a direction to move in.

Don't hold back here - these are your biggest fitness goals; the ones that you'd like to someday achieve. Research suggests that we accomplish more if we set out to do more, so don't worry if they sound unrealistic right now - creating more realistic milestones will come next.

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## Action 3 - Milestones

With your long-term goals laid out, the next task is to reverse engineer them - i.e. to break them down into smaller chunks. If you're not sure what these are, now's the time to do some research and get a clear understanding.

These smaller chunks will become your medium-term goals (i.e. goals you'd like to accomplish within six months to a year).

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## Action 4 - Training

Decide on, then rank the most effective actions or exercises to prioritize in your training. By clearly stating them, you know which are the most important to be working on.

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## Action 5 - Lifestyle

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## Action 6 - Integration

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With your day mapped out, decide on 2-3 small changes that'll make hitting your short-term goals more likely. Keep in mind that replacing or modifying an existing habit is far easier than creating a new one.

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