

MENTAL GYM-IN-A-BOX



Everything you need to know to run cognitive performance activities



The purpose of the 18th Field Artillery Mental-Gym-in-a-Box is to provide Master Fitness Trainers (MFTs) and Steel Fitness Trainers (SFTs) instructions on how to include cognitive performance activities into PT programming when desired. Each activity outlines the objective of the task, the targeted cognitive performance skill(s), and any materials that may be needed.

Cognitive Performance Skills & Activities:

- Energy Management
 - Thread the Needle
 - Stack the Washers
- Attention Control/Focus
 - Bear Crawl Finisher
 - Concentration Grid
- Decision-Making
 - Trails
- Memory
 - KIMS Game
- Communication
 - OPORD Communication

Questions regarding any activity should be directed to your H2F Cognitive Performance Specialist (CPS).

THREAD THE NEEDLE

Materials: Sewing needles and thread

Activity Objective: Complete the exercise as a team, then each individual must thread a needle before the team can move on to the next set of exercises.

Targeted Cognitive Performance Skill: Energy Management

Purpose: To manage nervous system activation and heart rate through deliberate breathing.

Rules:

1. Team members will complete a set of exercises (below) as a team. Each team member must complete the listed reps for each set.
2. As each individual completes his/her reps of the exercise, he/she may begin to thread a needle.
3. After all team members have successfully threaded their needles, the team can move on to the next set of exercises. Team members may not start the next set of exercises until ALL team members have threaded their needles.

Exercises:

Set 1 = 30 reverse lunges

Set 2 = 30 hand release pushups

Set 3 = 10 burpees

Set 4 = 30 mountain climbers

Set 5 = 30 air squats

** MFT/SFT can choose alternative exercises if desired

Alternate Option 1:

- Exercises can be distributed across the team. Let the team determine how they complete each exercise.
 - Set 1 = 100 burpees
 - Set 2 = 200 hand release push ups
 - Set 3 = 300 reverse lunges
 - Set 4 = 400 mountain climbers
 - Set 5 = 500 air squats

Alternate Option 2:

- Use this activity as part of a competitive finisher.
- For example: Each team member must run to a cone, complete an exercise set, thread a needle, then run back to start. Repeat this for each team member. Use as many sets of exercises as needed/desired.

STACK THE WASHERS

*** This activity is very similar to "Thread the Needle"*

Materials: 8 medium-sized washers, pencil or chopstick, table or clipboard

Activity Objective: As a team, stack 8 washers on top of each other (end-to-end) to create a stack.

Targeted Cognitive Performance Skill: Energy Management

Purpose: To manage nervous system activation and heart rate through deliberate breathing.

Rules:

1. This is a competitive event, create teams of 5+ people.
2. Place 8 washers on a table along with a pencil or chopstick.
3. When time starts, one person from each team must complete 10 burpees (or other high intensity exercise that will increase heart rate quickly) then sprint to the table with the washers.
4. Only using the pencil/chopstick, the individual must set one washer on its side.
5. Person cannot use two hands, cannot steady one hand with the other, or do anything extra to stabilize themselves.
6. Once one washer is stacked, person sprints back to the team and the next person in line repeats the process but must stack his/her washer on top of the previous one building a tower.
7. If, at any time, the stack of washers falls over, all team members must complete a set of ten burpees before then next person can sprint to the stack and start all over.

Alternate Option 1: Clipboard Option

***** this option adds a level of difficulty since the clipboard holder must also practice deliberate breathing to keep the clipboard steady.***

- All rules still apply
- Instead of stacking on a table, each team is given a clipboard
- Team must choose someone to hold the clipboard at the end of the sprint area.
- This person must hold the clipboard with one hand and it must be held away from the body. (Person cannot "brace" their arm against their body, leg, a wall, etc..)
- This person must always stand (cannot take a knee, etc.)
- While the person is holding the clipboard, team members sprint to him/her and stack washers on the clipboard.

KIMS GAME

Materials: Table or tray, cloth or towel, 10-20 random items (see suggestions below), paper, pens/pencils

Activity Objective: To use memory strategies to remember all items on the tray.

Targeted Cognitive Performance Skill: Attention Control, Memory

Set up:

- Place 10-20 random items on a table or tray and cover with a cloth or towel.

Rules:

1. Individuals get one minute to study the items on the table/tray. Re-cover the tray with the cloth after one minute.
2. On a blank piece of paper, individuals must write down as many items they can remember in one minute.

Alternate Options:

- After individuals study the items, facilitator rearranges the items and takes one item away. Individuals must identify which item is missing.
- Individuals cannot use the "typical" name for an item but must describe the item. For example, a paper clip could be described as a "silver, metal, wire, bent in two oval shapes".
- Individuals study the table/tray at the beginning of PT and instead of immediately trying to remember the items, they must wait until after PT to remember and write down as many items as possible. (The longer the time between study and writing is more challenging).
- Use items such as playing cards or pictures so that individuals must not only remember it was a card, but what suit/color/number was the card?
- Use as a memory challenge during a ruck march. Individuals can study the table/tray before the ruck and must remember when they return from the ruck.
- Add distractions while people are studying the table/tray and while they are writing what they are trying to remember.
- Instead of using a table/tray, place various items throughout a room. Hang items vertically. Walk team through the room in 60 seconds then ask them to write down what they remember and where items were located. Add difficulty by adding distractions and noises.
- Increased difficulty: Distribute objects along a trail or path (ie. Along a ruck march route). Individuals must not only notice what objects are "out of place" on the route, but then must remember them at the end of the ruck.
- The group stands in a large circle. Items are passed around the circle (one time). Individuals must remember what the items were and the order in which they were passed.

KIMS GAME cont.

Examples of Items to Use:

- Playing card
- Sugar, ketchup or other condiment packet
- Hard candy (jolly rancher/peppermint, etc.)
- Crayon or marker
- Straw
- Paperclip
- Poker chip
- Key
- Clothes pin
- Dice
- Battery
- Pencil
- Rubber Band
- Business Card
- Any Army-related item that individuals know (or maybe don't know).

OPORD COMMUNICATION

Materials: Table or tray, cloth or towel, 10-20 random items (see suggestions below), paper, pens/pencils

Activity Objective: To use memory strategies to remember all items on the tray.

Targeted Cognitive Performance Skill: Attention Control, Memory

Set up:

- Place 10-20 random items on a table or tray and cover with a cloth or towel.

Rules:

1. Individuals get one minute to study the items on the table/tray. Re-cover the tray with the cloth after one minute.
2. On a blank piece of paper, individuals must write down as many items they can remember in one minute.

Alternate Options:

- After individuals study the items, facilitator rearranges the items and takes one item away. Individuals must identify which item is missing.
- Individuals cannot use the "typical" name for an item but must describe the item. For example, a paper clip could be described as a "silver, metal, wire, bent in two oval shapes".
- Individuals study the table/tray at the beginning of PT and instead of immediately trying to remember the items, they must wait until after PT to remember and write down as many items as possible. (The longer the time between study and writing is more challenging).
- Use items such as playing cards or pictures so that individuals must not only remember it was a card, but what suit/color/number was the card?
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