

Mental

“Intellectual overmatch is paramount in multi-domain operations...
Mindfulness training is part of the campaign for
decision dominance and cognitive optimization.”

- Hosie, Sipos, and Britt (2023) in Maximizing Senior Leader Health and Wellbeing
U.S. Army War College



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Behavior change occurs by adapting habits and thought patterns through the tools, techniques, and strategies in the 5 domains of H2F. Taking a holistic approach to wellness, performance, and recovery gives Soldiers the best chance to be fit and healthy across the lifespan.

Below are 3 basic concepts of H2F's Mental Domain for Soldiers to leverage:

1. **Growth Mindset:**

Think adaptively and effectively about ourselves and our situation is a critical skill. Adopting a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset is at the core of adaptive thinking and performance.

Fixed mindsets are the belief that traits or skills are unchangeable, and often create an identity that sounds like, "I can't do that" or "I know everything on this." Fixed mindsets decrease mental flexibility by using a perspective that discourages innovation while perpetuating unhealthy competition, excuses, and/or disconnection that limits the potential of a person or group.

Growth mindsets allow for a good relationship with learning and change. This sounds like, "I can learn to do this" or "I can overcome that". It may also sound like, "I can use their inspiration to help me" or "How else can we solve this?" Growth mindsets encourage creative and critical thinking through applying skills and abilities with confidence and optimism to meet present demands.

Developing a growth mindset:

- a. Growth mindsets start through curiosity and asking questions
- b. Reflect on your word choice to learn when you might be using "always" or "never"
- c. Seek feedback from trusted peers, mentors, or subject-matter experts on your projects

2. **Stress Management:**

Stress elimination is not possible, but effectively managing stress (and the perspective of stress) can improve performance within leadership tasks, physical tasks, and long-term wellness.

Identifying the signs and impact of stress coupled with healthy coping strategies is essential for optimal daily functioning and long-term wellness.

Stress might look like (but not limited to):

- Mental: worry, lack of focus, reduced mental acuity, or lower motivation
- Emotional: anger, frustration, irritability, apathy, detachment, or isolation
- Physiological: increased heart rate, muscle tension, sickness, or poor sleep
- Behavioral: short-tempered, rude, abrupt statements, substance use

Healthy coping recognizes an internal locus of control, giving you power over your mind and responses. Unhealthy coping strategies are typically based on external locus of control, so external supports are also used (i.e., alcohol or tobacco); but, these lead to poor chronic health.

Consider strategies for your stress management toolkit on the next page.

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3. Mindfulness:

Mindfulness is the “awareness that emerges through deliberately paying attention, in the present moment, to the unfolding experience moment to moment.” Essentially, this is situational awareness of yourself and environment without dividing focus on past or future events.

There are many ways to practice mindfulness, and below are several ideas to get you started.

- **Easy Breathing:** Set a timer for 1-3min.
 - Start with an inhalation through the nose, exhalation through the mouth.
 - Once you get into a nice rhythm and feel relaxed you may have a thought or two that enters your mind. Simply acknowledge your thoughts and any associated feelings – rather than judging/critiquing yourself.
 - Continue the easy breathing for the remainder of the time.
- **Easy Breathing + Observation:** Set a timer for 1-3min.
 - Start with an inhalation through the nose, exhalation through the mouth.
 - As you are breathing take in your surrounding environment. It is amazing what you can learn by simply observing with curiosity and being present moment to moment. When we are mindful, we hear more, we see more, and we improve our focus and alertness.
- **Guided Observation:** This exercise will take 1-2 min.
 - Take 3 deep, belly breaths to center your focus.
 - Look around the room and *slowly* name 3 small details that you can see.
 - Next, close your eyes and *slowly* name 3 things you can hear.
 - Keeping your eyes closed, *slowly* name 3 things you can physically touch and feel (i.e. pants, chair, wind, etc.).
 - Take 3 last deep, belly breaths to end the session.

For additional Mental Readiness tools and skills, scan the QR code:



Couples and Intimacy Resources



Family Dynamic Resources



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Stress Management Toolkit

For when you need a quick calm or response:

- **Easy Breathing:** Doing slow inhalations through the nose and slow exhalations through the mouth. This is a great way to quiet the mind, lower heart rate, lower blood pressure, and foster calm feelings.
- **Power Statements:** Find a short quote, phrase, or image that brings you a sense of motivation, calm, confidence, power, or whatever you may need in the moment. The Army does this a lot already, such as with the phrase, “Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast!” This statement serves to center your focus.
- **Widen the Aperture:** Stress puts on “blinders” one’s perspective resulting in hyper-focus on immediate problems, barriers, or blame. Take a quick pause to zoom out, and consider the larger impact of the situation and how it fits into your life or mission. Consider socializing concerns for more perspective and using an entirely different lens.
- **Find an “Awe Moment”:** The expression of gratitude is the antithesis for distress, and the deliberate thought process can pull you out of a stress hijack. Whatever you find gratitude for can be small, but needs to be real. (e.g., “I’m grateful for this peer”, or even “I’m grateful my coffee is still warm!”)

For routine stress management training and wellness:

- **Schedule Reminders:** You are busy but want to improve your mental readiness. Schedule reminders to jog your memory and practice any of these skills for the quick calm or routine wellness.
- **PMCS Yourself:** Complete an honest, daily check of your systems: head, heart, body, spirit. This helps you stay tuned into which domain(s) need extra attention, and allow for improved self-awareness.
- **Walking*:** Simply requiring a pair of shoes and a little motivation, walking is a great tool for managing stress. Not only does walking help you gain psychological benefits, such as improving mood and cognitive clarity, but it is also an effective weight management tool and facilitates restorative sleep.
- **Visualization:** Try recalling images or places that have you feeling calm and relaxed. Incorporate as many sensory details as you can remember (sights, sounds, smells, feels, tastes). Often, visualizing a naturalistic scene, such as mountains, parks, or beaches, is a great way to break from the day-to-day.
- **Wellness Services:** Self-care is extremely important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Wellness-based services, such as massage therapy, can be another tool in your Stress Management Toolkit. You work hard and stress can take a mental, emotional, and physical toll as stated above. So treat yourself occasionally to a massage or another wellness-based service. It can be a delightful and beneficial part of your overall Stress Management/Energy Recovery Program.