

## THE CHALLENGE

Workload intensity, change, and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic can deplete cognitive and emotional resources, resulting in reduced performance and increased stress.

**One technique proven to increase cognitive and emotional resources is mindfulness.**

### Mindfulness is...

Mental training to focus attention on the present moment without elaboration or judgment

### Mindfulness in the military

Mindfulness has been trained and researched across the U.S. military<sup>1-4</sup>

## Why use mindfulness now?

The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic creates additional demands on our cognitive and emotional resources.

**Mindfulness** can help you to

- ✓ Recharge mentally and physically
- ✓ Enhance performance and decision making under stress

## Mindfulness results in better

- Operational performance<sup>4</sup>
- Attention<sup>1-3</sup>
- Mental focus<sup>1-3</sup>
- Emotion regulation<sup>3-4</sup>
- Mood<sup>3</sup>
- Sleep<sup>5</sup>

## Fundamental Mindfulness: Mindful Breathing



1. **Take** a moment to get comfortable
2. **Feel** free to close your eyes
3. **Settle** in and let go of any unnecessary tension in your body and mind
4. **Take** 3 deep and slow breaths and now let your breathing return to its normal pace
5. **Focus** your attention on where you feel the breath most—that's the target of your attention  
For example it could be your nostrils, it could be your chest, or your shoulders  
Select what is most salient for you and focus on it
6. **Notice** when your mind wanders away from this target and when it does, return it gently back to the sensation
7. **Practice** this exercise for 2-3 minutes
8. Gently **bring** movement back into hands and feet, as you complete the practice and return to everyday life

## Tips for Making Mindfulness Work for You

- Accept what comes up without judgment
- Be patient with yourself as your mind wanders
- Mind wandering is normal and expected—just bring your attention back to your breath
- Let go of trying to DO mindfulness
- Strike a balance between alertness and relaxation—some effort is needed to sustain attention, but too much can hinder your practice



## Advanced Mindfulness: Open Monitoring

1. **Take** a moment to get comfortable, and feel free to close your eyes
2. **Settle** in by taking a few deep and slow breaths
3. On each exhale, **relax** more deeply, letting go of tension in the neck and shoulders
4. **Allow** your breathing to continue at its own natural pace
5. **Expand** awareness beyond your physical self to your surroundings
6. **Be aware** of sounds, smells, the touch of air on your skin, light through the eyelids
7. **Notice** when your mind wanders, then gently bring your attention back to awareness
8. **Feel** yourself to be unchanging and timeless—even as things come and go around you
9. **Practice** this exercise for 5-10 minutes
10. Gently **open** and **close** your eyes a few times as you complete the practice and return to everyday life

## Additional Applications

### Integrating Mindfulness into Every Day

- Take a couple of mindful breaths throughout the day to recharge mentally and physically
- Take a moment to monitor your inner and outer experience while walking from one place to another
- Accept what can't be controlled
- In response to difficult situations, pause and act with intention rather than react in the moment

### Using Mindfulness to Connect

- Focus on sending positive thoughts to yourself and teammates to foster empathy and build cohesion
- Visualize a place in nature or another place that promotes well-being, calm, safety, and stability—feel free to imagine family, friends, or pets that support you in this safe place

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q: What does mindfulness involve?

A: Mindfulness typically consists of exercises that build capacity to focus attention on inner and outer experience.

### Q: Do I need to practice for hours every day?

A: Not necessarily. Benefits have been found with as little as 12 minutes a day and can be practiced a few days a week.

### Q. Do I have to sit cross-legged in a lotus position?

A: No, you can practice mindfulness in any position you want, like walking, lying down, or sitting in a chair.

### Q: When should I use mindfulness?

A: Mindfulness can be used when you want to manage stressful moments or restore attention and mental focus. It can also be used to build your capacity to operate under stress.

## Try these apps to practice mindfulness

Available on Apple and Google Play



### Mindfulness Coach

Learn mindfulness skills to manage stress



### Breath2Relax

Practice diaphragmatic breathing to reduce tension



#### Selected References:

<sup>1</sup>Jha et al. (2015). Minds "at attention": Mindfulness training curbs attentional lapses in military cohorts. *PLoS one*, 10(2). | <sup>2</sup>Zanenko et al. (2019). Mindfulness training as cognitive training in high-demand cohorts: An initial study in elite military service members. *Progress in brain research*, 244, 323-354. | <sup>3</sup>Jha et al. (2010). Examining the protective effects of mindfulness training on working memory capacity and affective experience. *Emotion*, 10(1), 54. | <sup>4</sup>Nassif et al. Mindfulness training and operational performance. Unpublished WRAIR Brief. | <sup>5</sup>Hülshlager et al. (2015). A low-dose mindfulness intervention and recovery from work. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 88(3), 464-489.

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