



# THE NEW NORMAL

June 2020

The Air Force faces a new normal as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact everyday life. This atypical environment is a marathon of unknown distance. Airmen may be experiencing a greater sense of isolation and fatigue. Airmen should prioritize physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness to build endurance, to mitigate negative mental health impacts, and to maintain mission-readiness under the new normal.

The Air Force maintains four top priorities for COVID-19 efforts:

- Protect the health and safety of the force, their families, and communities
- Maintain readiness
- Support the government's response to this pandemic
- Develop strategies to thrive in a new operational environment

Utilize and share the below information with fellow Wingmen to identify signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, tips and tools to maintain resilience, and available resources to ensure the Total Force maintains readiness under the new normal.

## Identifying Signs & Symptoms of Mental Health Conditions

This new normal of extended physical distancing may cause Airmen to experience a new type of mental fatigue and burnout, taking a toll on Airmen and their families by turning everyday activities like grocery shopping into stressors. Airmen may also be at an increased exposure to potentially traumatic situations due to their essential missions and may be at risk of developing or worsening mental health conditions as a result.

Recognizing signs and symptoms of mental health issues early, in oneself or others, is an important first step to know when to seek help:

- Trouble sleeping, insomnia
- Feeling anxious
- Irritable, frustrated, angry
- Feeling depressed
- Fatigue
- Poor self-care
- Flashbacks
- Trouble with memory and attention

## Avoiding Mental Fatigue & Burnout

At the outset of the pandemic, Airmen and their families eagerly followed local, state, and federal requirements to flatten the COVID-19 pandemic curve. However, as weeks of physical distancing have turned into months, individuals may feel drained from adapting to the new normal and the accompanying isolation and disrupted routines. There are available tools and techniques that can help reduce the impacts of mental fatigue to avoid a burnout.

- **Prioritize everyday health:** Remember to maintain basic health and self-care (e.g., sleep, exercise, nutrition, social connections). For specific self-care tips, refer to: [Mental Fitness During COVID-19](#)
- **Continue taking precautions:** Focus on personal behaviors and continue taking safety precautions. Remember that practicing physical distancing keeps you and everyone else safer
- **Remain calm & hopeful:** Focus on the good and on what can be controlled. This is an opportunity to slow down and focus on life's simple pleasures. However, if this is a period of ramping up, remember to practice self-care
- **Embrace the new normal:** Use new routines to feel stabilized. Find time for things that bring joy and improve mental fitness, like exercise and socializing. Keep in mind that this uncertain time will eventually pass

**“Although we know things will get better as we defeat this pandemic, the battlefield will never be the same.”** - Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright

**“Our space mission continues no matter the challenge .... and I believe it will be incredibly bright. We have the right people in place.”** - Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force Roger A. Towberman



## Lifestyle Habits to Build & Maintain Resilience

Major life changes and uncertainty can result in decreased physical health and wellness by disrupting established daily routines. However, physical fitness is essential for building resilience, particularly under today's new normal. "Staying fit is not only crucial for Airman readiness, but is also vital in reducing our risk of illness like COVID-19," says Col. Thomas Moore, Air Force Health Promotion Branch Chief (AF/SG). "Now more than ever, it is important for Airmen to maintain physical fitness, in addition to good nutrition and adequate sleep."

### NUTRITION

Airmen and their families may be concerned with how to safely shop for, order, and prepare food to stay healthy and boost immunity. These tips can be helpful for maintaining a nutritious diet:

- **Focus on "nutrient density":** Choose nutrient dense foods like whole grains, lean meats, beans, nuts, low fat dairy, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats
- **Minimize "empty calories":** Limit salty/sugary snacks with little to no nutrients, like cookies, candy or chips
- **Stay hydrated:** Maintain hydration by drinking a minimum of 64 ounces, or 8 cups, of water each day

### EXERCISE

Airmen should continue to stay active to maintain their physical and mental well-being during the pandemic. Exercise is an effective, low cost way to enhance one's mood and reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. Use these tips for getting daily exercise:

- **Make a schedule:** Build exercise into your daily schedule. Include family members and make it fun
- **Incorporate simple activities:** Go for a walk, run, or bike ride, while practicing safe physical distancing, rather than a structured workout
- **Try virtual workouts:** Try out mobile apps and videos for virtual workout classes or sessions
- **Adapt workout routines:** Be creative by incorporating new workout routines or exercises using body weight, household items, and new practices. Examples may include:
  - Use body weight to perform strength exercises like planks, squats, lunges, and push-ups
  - Improve both cardio and strength through high-intensity interval training
  - Improve balance, flexibility, and relaxation through yoga

### SLEEP

Consistent, high-quality sleep provides a wide-range of health benefits, which is why it is critical during the pandemic. Health benefits include improving the immune system, heightening brain function, enhancing mood, and improving mental health. Use the following tips to get a good night's sleep:

- **Keep a routine:** Keep a consistent sleep routine and schedule
- **Consider power naps:** Schedule power naps as needed, keep naps to 20 minutes or less
- **Create a comfortable environment:** Set a comfortable temperature in the room
- **Limit screen time at night:** Get natural light during the day and limit light at night, especially light from TV, phones, and computer screens
- **Exercise:** Get consistent physical activity during the day
- **Practice relaxation techniques:** Practice mindfulness or deep breathing
- **Manage food and sleep:** Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and limit food and drink at least 2 hours before sleep

Refer to the Resources section on the following pages for available mental and physical health COVID-19 resources.

*The appearance of hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the United States Air Force, or the Department of Defense, of the external Website, or the information, products or services contained therein.*



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## COVID-19 Resources

- [Air Force](#) Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Website
- [Air Force Resilience](#) COVID-19 Resources Website
- [Department of Defense](#) Coronavirus: DOD Response Website
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website
- [COVID Coach](#) for self-care and overall mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic
- [Veteran Affairs](#) Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Website

## Mental Fitness Resources

- [Trusted advocates](#) like family members, fellow Wingmen, or Command Leadership
- [Air Force Chaplains](#) offer confidential counseling and spiritual and religious guidance
- [Military and Family Life Counseling \(MFLC\) Program](#) offers short-term counseling to Airmen and families. Call 800-342-9647 or contact the local MFLC
- [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) provides 24/7 confidential counseling support for emotional distress due to disasters. Call 800-985-5990 or text 66746
- [Military OneSource](#) provides health and wellness resources, counseling services, and 24/7 confidential help. Call 800-342-9647 or [chat](#) online
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) provides 24/7 confidential support. Call 800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522 if you are unable to speak safely
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) provides 24/7 confidential support and prevention and crisis resources. Call 1-800-273-8255 or [chat](#) online
- [Safe Helpline](#) gives 24/7 confidential support to sexual assault survivors. Call 877-995-5247 or [chat](#) online
- [Vet Centers](#) provides 24/7 confidential social and psychological services for service members, veterans, and families. Call 877-927-8387

## Physical Fitness Resources

- [Military Treatment Facility \(MTF\)](#) provides medical treatment for health and wellness care to Total Force Airmen. These Programs are available to ARC Airmen when on active duty orders, approved Line of Duty, or in any emergency situation. Contact the local MTF
- [TRICARE](#) provides medical care as well as regular COVID-19 updates

## Emergencies

- [Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room](#)
- [Military Crisis Line](#) provides 24/7 hotline confidential counseling, for members and families facing a crisis. Call 800-273-8255, then press 1; text 838255; or [chat](#) online
- [Crisis Text Line](#) provides 24/7 confidential crisis support. Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a counselor

## Apps

- [COVID Coach](#) for self-care and overall mental health support
- [Breathe2Relax](#) for breathing exercises and skills
- [Calm](#) for meditation and sleep
- [Happify](#) for science-based activities and games to boost happiness
- [Headspace](#) for meditation and mindfulness
- [Mindfulness Coach](#) for mindfulness techniques
- [Mood Coach](#) for enhancing mood
- [Move! Coach](#) for weight loss and management goals, including diet and exercise
- [MyPlate](#) for building and maintaining healthy eating habits. Download the [MyPlate app](#)
- [Human Performance Resources by CHAMP](#) for optimized performance to achieve total fitness
- [VA FitHeart](#) for leading a healthy lifestyle

## Other Resources

- [Department of the Air Force Resilience](#) for resiliency resources like the Community Support Coordinator
- [Department of the Air Force Invisible Wounds Initiative](#) for Airmen and families living with invisible wounds
- [Blue Grit Podcast](#) for stories of resilience and mental health
- [Center for Traumatic Stress](#) for mental health resources

# MANAGING UNCERTAINTY & MAINTAINING RESILIENCE



Use this Managing Uncertainty and Maintaining Resilience tool to help Airmen prioritize things that are within their control. Customize the tool for each Airman's own needs.

## I CANNOT CONTROL

I can let go of these things

How long the COVID-19 pandemic will last

\_\_\_\_\_

How others react

Travel restrictions

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## I CAN CONTROL

I will focus on these things

Having a positive attitude

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If others follow pandemic guidance

If I follow CDC Guidance, including social distancing

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How often I connect with family, friends, and co-workers

A daily routine and healthy diet

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Ongoing economic impact

My news intake

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