



MENTAL FITNESS DURING COVID-19

April 2020

As Secretary of the Air Force Barbara Barrett said, “Today our nation faces an unprecedented threat. [COVID-19](#) presents a challenge we have not faced before, but we will get through this, together.” It is now more important than ever that Airmen take care of themselves and prioritize and maintain their mental fitness—this will help keep the Total Force agile and mission-ready.

The Air Force has three top priorities for COVID-19:

- Protect the health and safety of the force, their families, and communities
- Maintain readiness
- Support the government’s response to this pandemic

Utilize and share the below information on anxiety and stress management, self-care, counseling, and available resources with fellow Wingmen to ensure the Total Force stays mentally fit and resilient during this turbulent time.

Anxiety & Stress Management

Mental fitness is a vital part of an Airman’s overall readiness and is critical during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the physical distancing requirements, Airmen may be experiencing increased feelings of anxiety and stress, which may show up as:

- Constant fear and worry about personal health and the health of loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

"Social distancing does not mean being socially disconnected. In fact, we've got to make sure we are working hard to stay connected."

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein

" We each play a role in preventing the spread of this virus... Let's tackle this challenge, as we do all challenges which confront us."

Space Force Chief of Space Operations
Gen. John W. Raymond

COPING WITH ANXIETY AND STRESS

Remind fellow Airmen that they are doing their part to minimize the risks of COVID-19 to them, their families, and their communities by practicing physical distancing and following protocols set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Defense, and the Department of the Air Force.

The following tips can be incorporated into an Airman’s daily routine to manage anxiety and stress in order to improve mental fitness:

- **Practice deep breathing, stretching, and meditation:** Use these techniques to relax the mind and body
- **Avoid information overload:** Stay informed through trusted sources, but try to reduce repeated consumption of pandemic information
- **Take screen breaks:** Rest the eyes and brain by taking regular screen-time breaks (computer, TV, and phone)
- **Focus on what can be controlled:** Create a list of all the things that can be controlled and focus on how to achieve them



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Self-Care

Self-care and staying virtually connected is more important than ever to maintaining mental fitness, especially during this time of physical distancing. Airmen may be experiencing increased feelings of isolation, anxiety, and stress—this is normal when adjusting to new daily routines. Practicing self-care can help make Airmen mentally resilient by improving the mood, increasing positive feelings, and reducing anxiety and stress. **View self-care as a necessity, not a reward.** There are no prerequisites for self-care.

PRACTICING SELF-CARE FOR RESILIENCE

The following coping techniques can help Airmen practice self-care by prioritizing mental resilience to overcome added stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation:

- **Prioritize healthy routines:** Make healthy nutrition, hydration, sleep, exercise, and human companionship part of daily life
- **Journal/Express gratitude:** Practice journaling to better understand emotions and sources of joy, which can lift spirits and reduce stress
- **Connect with others:** Maintain digital connections to help overcome feelings of isolation
 - **Social media:** Stay in touch with loved ones and friends through social media
 - **Video gatherings:** Set up designated times to have virtual gatherings or a game night with friends and family; seeing a familiar face or group of faces increases feelings of connectedness
 - **Phone Calls:** Take time to talk to family and friends on the phone, especially those who may not have access to social media or video capabilities
- **Talk to family and children:** Let family members, including children, know it is ok to talk about their feelings; they may also be feeling added stress and anxiety
- **Spend time with pets or spend time outside in nature:** Find a quiet spot to sit or go for a walk with or without a pet; nature and animals can calm the mind when emotions are high

Counseling

If Airmen are unsure of how to manage increased feelings of anxiety, stress, and isolation, counseling may be an option to explore. If new to counseling, [Military OneSource](#) is available 24/7/365 to help service members and their families manage mental health challenges, including those related to COVID-19, as well as provide non-medical counseling and support. Call 800-342-9647 or connect via [live chat](#).

VIRTUAL COUNSELING OPTIONS

Behavioral health care teams may be facilitating additional mental health care for those in need during this time. Reach out to healthcare providers to find out what tele-health services they may offer.

Below are some tips for participating in tele-counseling sessions:

- **Select a safe space:** Find a comfortable space and set intentional time for counseling
- **Create comfort in the new format:** Wear comfortable clothing and allow pets to join the tele-counseling sessions
- **Practice naming your emotion:** Name your emotion to help health providers assess non-verbal cues, such as body language or tone of voice, which may be more difficult to determine during phone or video sessions
- **Don't be afraid to provide your counselor feedback:** Communicate specific needs, especially during this challenging time

Refer to the Resources section here for other counseling, mental health, and available COVID-19 resources.



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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
- [Veteran Affairs](#) Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Website

Mental Fitness Resources

TALK TO SOMEONE

- **Trusted advocates** like family members, fellow Wingmen, or Command Leadership can help offer support to maintain mental fitness
- **Air Force Chaplains** offer confidential counseling and spiritual and religious guidance. Contact the local chapel for virtual service schedules and counseling
- **Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) Program** is an on-base resource located in the [A&FRC](#) offering solution-focused, short-term counseling to Total Force Airmen and their families. Call 800-342-9647 or contact the local MFLC
- **Disaster Distress Helpline** provides 24/7 confidential counseling support to people experiencing emotional distress due to natural or human-caused disasters. Call 800-985-5990 or text 66746 to connect with a counselor
- **Military OneSource** provides health and wellness resources, counseling services for stress, anger, self-esteem, relationships, and bullying, and 24/7 confidential help. Call 800-342-9647 or [chat](#) online
- **Crisis Text Line** provides 24/7 confidential crisis support. Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a counselor
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline** provides victims and survivors with 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 for people in distress as well as prevention and crisis resources. Call 1-800-273-8255 or [chat](#) online with a counselor
- **Safe Helpline** provides the DoD community, affected by sexual assault, with peer-to-peer support, self-care resources, and 24/7 confidential aid. Call 877-995-5247 or [chat](#) online
- **Vet Centers** are community-based facilities that provide a wide range of social and psychological services for service members, veterans, and families. Vet Centers are separate from Veterans Affairs sites and all counseling is confidential. The Vet Center Call Center is open 24/7 at 877-927-8387

SEEK MEDICAL SUPPORT

- **Military Treatment Facility (MTF)** provides short- and long-term medical treatment options for direct health and wellness care for 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** is a 24/7 hotline that offers confidential, immediate help and connects military service members and their families who are experiencing a crisis with trained counselors. Call 800-273-8255, then press 1; text 838255; or [chat](#) online

APPS, PODCASTS, & 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
- **Breathe2Relax** for breathing exercises and skills
- **Calm** for meditation and sleep
- **Center for Traumatic Stress** for mental health resources
- **COVID Coach** for self-care and overall mental health support during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **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

COMPREHENSIVE AIRMEN SELF-CARE CHECKLIST



Use this self-care checklist to help maintain and improve Comprehensive Airman Fitness (i.e., physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness). Customize the checklist for each Airman's own resiliency needs.

Mental Fitness

Did you...

- Say aloud or journal one thing for which you are grateful
- If you feel off, talk to someone or ask your Command Leadership or a provider for help
- Spend time outdoors and get fresh air daily
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Physical Fitness

Did you...

- Get at least 7–8 hours of sleep
- Eat 5 servings of fruits and veggies a day
- Exercise daily for 30 - 60 minutes, make it fun by working out with family or friends at a safe distance or virtually
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Social Fitness

Did you...

- Connect with family, friends, or Wingmen two to three times per week
- Stay connected through social activities, like social media, game nights, or live meet-ups
- Check on neighbors by calling, talking from a distance, or dropping a note into their mailbox
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Spiritual Fitness

Did you...

- Spend time in prayer or meditation, focus on the good
- See this time as an opportunity to slow down, enjoy the silence and refocus your goals
- Strengthen your beliefs, faith, friendships, principles, and reflect on what is important and gives you meaning
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