

Helping Sailors and Marines Withstand, Recover and Grow



Guide for Psychological and Emotional Well-Being



NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER
PREVENTION AND PROTECTION START HERE

Health Promotion and Wellness Department

Our mission is to provide innovative and evidence-based health promotion and wellness (HPW) programs and services that facilitate readiness and resilience, prevent illness and injury, hasten recovery and promote lifelong healthy behaviors and lifestyles. Our vision is to be a world-class Center of Excellence empowering people to live healthier lives.

Psychological and Emotional Well-Being

You're asked to do things most people can't do, be in situations most people can't handle or make decisions most people couldn't fathom. These challenges may place a big toll on you. Yet, to be successful in the Navy and Marine Corps, you have to be resilient and psychologically strong. That's where the Health Promotion and Wellness Department of the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center can help. We have the resources and tools to help you navigate stress and strengthen your resilience so you can perform at your best. If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call the Military Crisis Line for confidential support at 1-800- 273-TALK (8255) and Press 1.

Purpose

This guide is designed as a resource to introduce the topic of psychological and emotional well-being and stress management. Consider using this guide during a short presentation and highlight any messages that are relevant to your command with the links provided. Be sure to review the links provided so that you are familiar with them and choose the ones most beneficial to your site.

**[WWW.MED.NAVY.MIL/SITES/NMCPHC/HEALTH-PROMOTION/
PSYCHOLOGICAL-EMOTIONAL-WELLBEING](http://WWW.MED.NAVY.MIL/SITES/NMCPHC/HEALTH-PROMOTION/PSYCHOLOGICAL-EMOTIONAL-WELLBEING)**

Contents

Psychological Health: Signs and Symptoms of Good Health.....	4
Stress: What It is and is Not	5
The Operational Stress Control Continuum	9
Building Resilience.....	10
Recovery and Coping Strategies.....	13
Resources.....	17





Psychological Health: Signs and Symptoms of Good Health*

Review this list and determine which items you are able to check off as true for yourself most of the time.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep well most nights | <input type="checkbox"/> Low level of alcohol use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Productive in daily activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to relax most days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of purpose |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyment found in life or leisure activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate levels of organization or cleanliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life decisions are made based on commitments and values | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate to high level of fitness for your life situation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Effective communication with work mates, friends, & family | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to handle most problems in a confident, calm, and solution-oriented manner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Positive, hopeful attitude with direction | <input type="checkbox"/> Give and receive camaraderie and support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upkeep of daily grooming and hygiene | |

* Reference: National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and Operational Stress Control Continuum

Congratulations on the items you checked off. Everything on this list impacts your state of health and well-being. Self-care is like car maintenance - to keep it running well, you need to care for it. Self-care is important to mental and physical performance and a positive state of mind.

Note the items you left blank. When demands and challenges mount, daily functioning can become exhausting and unproductive. If you find yourself moving away from a state of psychological health for more than a few days or weeks, or you find your mood and abilities moving in a downward direction, asking for support, gathering information, taking time to sort things out and resting are all confidence building and effective steps to getting back on track.

Help could come from a friend, chaplain, counselor, or a health professional and often times it is beneficial to seek guidance from more than one source. By working through these issues sooner rather than later, you may save yourself from increased stress and health concerns.



Stress: What It is and is Not

Stress - What is it? It is often an overused and misunderstood term. One simple definition is the brain's response to any demand placed upon it. Organically, it is neither negative nor positive. It is the body's physiological response designed to help us survive a danger or threat.

When stress is discussed it is important to define the term "stressor". A stressor is any perceived or real demand placed upon our body and brain. It may be obvious - such as an IED going off or planning an exciting vacation, or it may be something that is slow growing and a low volume demand made on our senses such as hearing a siren in the distance for hours on end. The other factor in stress is thoughts, also known as cognitions. Any thought can increase or decrease stress level.

In other words, perception and what we tell ourselves can create stress. For example, think on these things – a spider, a snake, a thunderstorm, a deadline, a body of water, or your cell phone not working. All sorts of different images may pop into your mind with different thoughts associated with them. If a spider brings to mind a stressful scene or thoughts, that may be a learned response based on past experiences. Thoughts are very powerful. However, they can be changed. Replacing old memories or thinking patterns with new ones that are helpful, calming and productive will assist in managing stress in future situations.

The stress response and terminology of stress

As mental and emotional health is impacted by stress level, it is important to have a basic understanding of stress. In this section, descriptions of the General Adaptation Syndrome¹ and terminology related to stress are addressed.

Dr. Hans Selye (1907-1982), an endocrinologist, developed the concept of the general adaptation syndrome to describe the physiological response to stress. Although there are evolutions from the original theory with differences in which chemical messengers are activated under stress, to what degree, and under what type of circumstances, the General Adaptation Syndrome can provide an overview of our bodies and minds most basic response to stress. It is a three-stage reaction to stress. The stages are Alarm, Resistance, and Exhaustion.

In the model below, note that if no recovery time exists, an individual may progress to the exhaustion stage due to depleted resources. This increases the risk of a stress related illness and injury.

GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME

Stage 1: Alarm



Homeostasis is disrupted due to responding to a stressor; automatically your body prepares for surviving a threat by activating the fight or flee response:

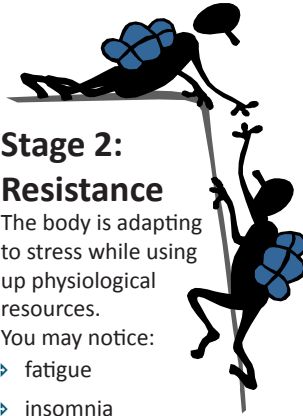
- ▶ heart rate increases
- ▶ respiration rate increases
- ▶ blood flow to large muscles & extremities increases

Stage 2: Resistance

The body is adapting to stress while using up physiological resources.

You may notice:

- ▶ fatigue
- ▶ insomnia
- ▶ irritability
- ▶ muscle tension



Stage 3: Exhaustion

Resources are depleted; symptoms persist; illness and injury occur:

- ▶ fatigue
- ▶ rage
- ▶ panic
- ▶ isolating
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ prone to substance abuse
- ▶ and depression
- ▶ prone to heart disease



Terms Related to Stress

Eustress: Challenges, adventure, and exciting life changes are all part of what is termed eustress or the positive, healthy side of stress. Often times this includes travel in the form of vacation or deployment, a new relationship, a promotion, or a new baby. The Yerkes-Dodson Principle² is founded on the basis that everyone has a unique level of stress that is productive and beneficial for them. When you function below this level of productivity for too long boredom and apathy may set in and when you work over this individualized optimal level for an extended period of time signs of chronic stress, fatigue, and lower performance crop up. Being aware of your optimal stress level will make it

apparent when you have moved from a healthy to unhealthy amount of stress.

Distress:

Distress is the negative side of stress. It includes daily hassles such as technology glitches, deadlines, and car troubles. Distress also includes more severe threats to include significant loss (people, pets, limbs, lifestyle, meaning), inner conflicts, and physical and emotional wear and tear. All of these many forms of distress can overwhelm any one and contribute to stress injuries and illness. Often times the word stress is commonly used to describe distress.



- ▶ Acute stress- It is short-lived and comes from an immediate experience. It can be exciting, but too much or too often can be exhausting. It could be a flat tire, a broken phone, or a training exercise that is demanding. Acute stress is common and because it is a brief encounter most often it does not have time to do great damage if dealt with quickly.
- ▶ Episodic stress – It is repeated acute stress, too many pressures at one time. It can also be an ongoing psychological state; this could include a worrier or a state of hyper vigilance where one is trying to imagine all the worst case scenarios and take action against them. This can create irritability, anxiety, agitation, and exhaustion. Think of the person who is always in high gear. Finding time to problem solve and relax will assist in minimizing stress symptoms.
- ▶ Chronic stress – This form of stress is not alleviated, it is constant. It weighs one down and wears them out. It includes life situations such as a demanding job, caretaking, or an abusive relationship. Chronic stress is exhausting and can lead to long term health issues if it is not addressed and healing is unable to occur.
- ▶ Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)– After seeing or being part of an intense or horrific event, the following symptoms could occur for days or week after the event
 - ▶ reexperiencing the event
 - ▶ hyper arousal - being on high alert in your surroundings and action
 - ▶ avoidance behavior
 - ▶ feeling emotionally numb

After several weeks with recovery time and healing the symptoms subside.

- ▶ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – This is a more chronic condition (lasting longer than a month) than ASD and onset may not occur for several months. It affects daily living with the same symptoms as ASD and is caused by a severe, intense, or traumatic event or series of events. PTSD taxes your physical and emotional state and depletes your stress resources. With assistance, individuals can heal and recover within a few months and sometimes it can take much longer.

Ready State:

The Ready State is based on the concept of being mission ready. The Ready State for life is one of positive mental and physical well-being. You are fit for life. Mental stress injuries need a time of recovery just as a physical wound needs time to heal. Having confidence in your ability to recover and seek help is part of resilience and being in a ready state. Whether the term stress or distress is used in this booklet, it is about the demand placed on the body and brain due to stressors, the toll they take on you and the use of strategies to lessen the severity of stress and strengthen self so that you can get back to a life you love and be in the ready state.



The Operational Stress Control Continuum

The Operational Stress Control Continuum³ is a tool that can assist in bringing areas of concern and indicators of a stress injury to your attention. Prevention and seeking treatment early on, as well as, support from others is the best strategy to finding one's way back to a resilient state of health and enjoying life. Below find some basic definitions on the four zones of navigating stress. Be aware of them for yourself, coworkers, shipmates and family members.



- ▶ **Ready/Green Zone** indicates adaptive coping, effective functioning and wellness. Stress may be present but flexibility, control, and coping mechanisms are optimal.
- ▶ **Reacting/Yellow Zone** indicates mild to moderate stress changes occur that may include changes typical of the alarm state in the general adaptation syndrome noted in section 2. Your body is responding to survive the threat. This can increase anxiety, irritability, and insomnia. Typically, the yellow zone is transient and can be resolved fairly quickly with healthy coping techniques and rest.
- ▶ **Injured/Orange Zone** is entered when persistent stress or severe distress exist. Whatever has occurred is leaving a memory and perhaps, creating a more severe change in behavior. It can include rage, panic, or chronic insomnia. Social withdrawal and other symptoms noted in the resistance stage of the general adaptation syndrome may also be noted when in the orange zone. Time to heal and healthy coping techniques are keys to recovery. Using ineffective coping strategies can compound your stress level and lead to impaired health, work problems, and family issues.
- ▶ **Ill/Red Zone** is apparent when symptoms and distress are mounting with little to no relief over weeks and months. This can lead to anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, and other medical conditions. Treatment is imperative. Ask for support from professionals such as a leader, chaplain, health care provider, or counselor.



Building Resilience

Withstand, recover and grow is the Navy's definition for resilience. If done well, we thrive.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as

the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress- such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. To read more about what the APA has to say go to <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> – The Road to Resilience⁴.



Below find a brief explanation of traits of resilience.

Physical fitness - A strong muscle system, cardiovascular system and immune system. This prepares your heart and body for stressors. If the heart and body are fit, they effectively respond to alarming situations and recover quickly. Regular activity is a factor in recovering from stressful events as it allows the body to use up the stress hormones related to the alarm state mentioned above in the General Adaptation Syndrome.

Mental fitness - A strong and healthy mental state. A variety of components build this state of well-being. Find them below.

- ▶ **Self-efficacy:** Psychologist Dr. Albert Bandura defined this as self-judgment of one's ability to perform a task within a specific domain. This is basically the belief and confidence that you will figure things out or connect with people who can help you figure things out, that you are a problem-solver, and that you will come out of the situation and thrive.
- ▶ **Mental preparation:** As each of us lives life, we gain experience on what to do and what not to do. All of those experiences help prepare us and build a better skill set. On tasks that have never been done before, going through a mental and physical rehearsal is the best preparation available. A golf pro, Olympic skier, or NASCAR driver all use their mind and body for this type of preparation and so have you. In the military you know all about this with

"Be prepared for the worst, and hope for the best."

running drills and participating in training. This skill can apply to all areas of life.

- ▶ **Break the task down:** When working on a large task break it down to help reduce being overwhelmed. Moving from step one to step two is the way to get started and to find success. For example, preparing for the PFA may include running. You want to run more often but you don't like it and you have many reasons why it is last on your to-do list. Moving from step one to step two in this case may mean putting on your running shoes and going outside. Once step one is complete you can move on to step two - how far and fast will you run today?
- ▶ **Life experience of others:** Observing others' mistakes and triumphs can assist you in learning how to do something or what not to do. If your squadron leader can perform a challenging task, you might think..."Ok, I can do that." If your buddy gets in trouble for alcohol use, you might think, I am definitely going to stay away from drinking.
- ▶ **A positive, optimistic attitude and self-talk:** This can be learned. It is the internal messaging that states, "good job!", "you can do it", "keep it up!" This goes a long way in having a positive mental mindset and maintaining a belief in success.
- ▶ **Cognitive flexibility:** This is the ability to bend but not break when changes in plans occur or performance is less than optimal. Everyone has negative thoughts from time to time, such as throwing in the towel, blowing it or feeling like a failure. Avoid getting stuck in that thinking. Learn from it, shake it off, and let those thoughts go. Move on to the next thoughts which are usually more positive and constructive and focus on them.
- ▶ **Socially connected:** Being socially connected to others who are positive and optimistic contributes to unit cohesion in the work force and the home front. Ideally, these people provide support, validate your concerns, and enjoy a good laugh. Look out for and apply the same philosophy to your shipmates, your command, and your family



A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book.

~Irish Proverb

members.

- ▶ Sense of purpose and commitment: The dedication to something bigger than yourself (i.e. family, your unit, spiritual faith) gives deeper meaning and purpose to life. Allowing overall purpose and main commitments in life to guide behavior and decision-making will reduce internal conflict and provide a sense of direction.
- ▶ Leadership in life: Who is at the helm? Are they positive? Do they pull the family or unit together? Do they guide and instruct? Are you a leader? Who do you seek support from on leadership? All of these are important questions to answer. Strong leadership provides stable, proactive support.
- ▶ Having faith: Belief in God and prayer go a long way in letting go of losses, finding forgiveness, and providing hope for the future.



Recovery and Coping Strategies

The idea of spending time recovering from a stressful period or event could be a new concept. However, optimal performance may be compromised by psychological changes such as anxiety, depression, increased irritability, and insomnia if rest and recovery strategies are not implemented. What exactly does recovery look like? It can look a little different for everyone and is different from down time spent with distractions.

Handling stress day after day by sitting down and watching television, enjoying social media, or gaming can serve as a great distraction. However, it is not the same as true recovery and deep relaxation. Below is the short list of some of the most powerful actions you can take for psychological health.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Learning how to initiate deep relaxation or the relaxation response offers several benefits to include:

- A decrease in heart rate
- A decrease in respirations
- A decrease in blood pressure
- Improved attention, clarity, and focus
- Improved immunity
- Decrease in tissue inflammation

Automatically, you breathe and your heart beats for a lifetime. The breath is a powerful force for health and healing. The breath is an involuntary mechanism meaning humans do not need to think about every breath taken. It just happens automatically. However, an individual can bring the breath under control. Controlled breathing through diaphragmatic (deep), rhythmic inhales and exhales initiates a relaxed state in the body and may assist in focusing the mind⁵.

The breath is the foundation of most relaxation techniques. Learning how to breathe deeply and rhythmically is medicinal to your body and mind. On most days, little is thought about breathing. However, emotions impact our breathing. Being anxious, angry, or in pain all change the way breathing occurs. Each breath becomes shallow and breaths per minute increase. Additionally, holding one's breath for short periods of time can be common. Therefore, by choosing to focus on taking deep, rhythmic breaths a person's mental state may

change and the body begins to relax. Anxiety, anger, and pain may subside. The best way to start is with a simple guided breathing exercise or meditation. Breathing is considered your life energy. As noted by Swami Rama, in the Science of Breath, “Controlling the breath is a prerequisite to controlling the mind and the body”. Try the basic technique below.

Counting Breath Exercise

A very simple breathing technique is as follows:

- 1) Still your body while sitting in a chair or lying on the floor in a quiet, safe place. Closing your eyes or using an eye mask may be beneficial.
- 2) Get comfortable in this space by breathing naturally and noticing your breath for a few minutes. Note that you are not trying to DO anything at this point but observe your breath and thoughts.
- 3) Place one hand over your heart and one hand on your belly, below your belly button and notice your breath moving in through your nose to your lungs, followed by gentle chest or belly movement and then exhale. Stay here for a few minutes.
- 4) Now, with each inhale draw the breath in to a count of 3, with each exhale release the breath to a count of 3. Slowing your breathing down without straining to do so, find a rhythm that works for you. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to counting 1, 2, 3 as you inhale....1, 2, 3 releasing the breath, exhaling out the breath.
- 5) Steady your count and your breathing for 5-10 minutes. When you are ready to end the time, gently wiggle your fingers and toes, move your head side to side, one deep breath in with a stretch of arms overhead, and slowly come to a seated position if you have been lying down. Open your eyes, if they have been closed. Be aware of how you feel, give yourself a positive message and move on with your day. It is very important to not jump right up when you are done with a session. Give your body a minute or two to readjust.

“Controlling the breath is a prerequisite to controlling the mind and the body”, notes Swami Rama in the Science of Breath.

- ▶ **Self-Care:** By caring for yourself you are better able to care for those around you, determine what energizes you, and find places of comfort and safety. Self-care could come in the form of more sleep, a creative hobby, a nature walk, eating food from the earth, writing, reading or an hour to yourself each week. Self-care is not self-indulgent. It is necessary.
- ▶ **Sleep:** Going into each day with a lack of adequate sleep can create deficits

in our functioning. Poor sleep is associated with increases in accidents, error rates, irritability, fatigue and depressed mood.

In order to get a good night sleep try the following tips from the National Institute of Health:

- ▶ Minimize noise and light
- ▶ Maintain a regular sleep schedule – allowing you to wake and sleep within the same time frame most days
- ▶ Limit caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants to four to six hours before you plan to sleep
- ▶ Limit use of technology with screen light at least 15 to 30 minutes before sleeping
- ▶ Foster a calm and comfortable sleep environment (consider using a blanket, fan, or eye mask)
- ▶ Limit eating to two to three hours before bed time
- ▶ Exercise often, it promotes restful sleep
- ▶ Get morning sunlight if you hope to sleep at night – this helps your body set its natural sleep-wake cycle



Enter sleep with positive, relaxing thoughts. What went right that day, a relaxing breathing exercise, an image of a beautiful place, and lay down the worries and burdens of the day.

- ▶ **Cognitions:** Positive thoughts or affirmations - Throughout the day check in with your thinking, remembering that thoughts can be changed. If you find that you are having strong emotional responses or allowing your emotions to ruin your day due to the stress or trauma you have experienced, trade some of those in for a rational, positive viewpoint. This may minimize the stress response. Examples of applying positive cognitions include:
 - ▶ I am doing the best I can in this moment
 - ▶ Let me focus on the task at hand
 - ▶ Everyone makes mistakes
 - ▶ I can learn and move on

- Change is a process not an event
 - I can do it I am calm and relaxed
 - I am grateful for...
- **Staying in the moment:** Do you allow yourself to keep your thoughts in the past with guilt and regret or perhaps, in the future to what might happen? If so, this moment is eaten away with these thoughts. Staying in the moment requires focus and mindfulness.

A simple thought or two to remind you of the present may help. For example asking, “What positive things can I do or say right now in this moment?” may be very beneficial to staying on task, problem solving, and focusing. Choose a mindfulness activity from the Relax Relax Toolkit to assist you in understanding more about how to stay in the present moment.

- **Social network of positive people:** Once again, the power of people is important to your prevention and recovery from stressful or traumatic events. Surround yourself with people who are mostly positive and all look out for each other, get involved with leisure activities that include others with similar interest, spend time with people you enjoy.

A recent report suggested that greater levels of social companionship or integration are associated with lower PTSD symptom severity pre-treatment...Source: NCCOSC Research Quarterly Summer 2013

- **Seek help:** At some point in life most everyone runs into challenges that can be overwhelming. Recognize that getting help is a powerful coping strategy that can be very effective over many other options available to you and Live Well.

¹Goldstein, David. Adrenal Responses to Stress. National Institute of Health Public Access. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3056281/>. Accessed 01 October 2013

²<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886994902267>

³Naval Center for Combat Operational Stress Control. The Stress Continuum. <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcsc/nccosc/serviceMembersV2/stressManagement/theStressContinuum/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed 5 September 2013.

⁴The Road to Resilience, American Psychological Association. <http://www.apa.org/print-this.aspx>. Access 09 September 2013

⁵National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Relaxation Techniques for Health: An Introduction. <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm>. Published August 2011. Updated February 2013. Accessed September 2013.



Resources

NMCPHC HPW Psychological and Emotional-Well-being:

www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/psychological-emotional-wellbeing/Pages/psychological-emotional-wellbeing.aspx

Relax Relax Toolkit:

www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/psychological-emotional-wellbeing/relax-relax/pages/index.html

Stress Zones:

www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/support/21st_Century_Sailor/suicide_prevention/command/PublishingImages/OSCFamilyBrochure_Nov10.pdf

www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcsc/nccosc/serviceMembersV2/stressManagement/theStressContinuum/Pages/default.aspx

PTSD:

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml

Operation Healthy Reunions:

www.nmha.org/reunions/infoBacktoNormal.cfm

National Institute of Mental Health:

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml

NMCPHC HPW Active Living:

www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/active-living/Pages/active-living.aspx

Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control:

www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcsc/nccosc/serviceMembersV2/buildResilience/resilienceWhatIsIt/Pages/default.aspx

About the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center

The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) consults, develops, and shapes public health for the Navy and Marine Corps in a variety of areas, including environmental health, population health, and preventive medicine. NMCPHC's vision is protection through prevention, and the mission is to provide worldwide Force Health Protection services to Naval and Joint forces in support of the National Military Strategy. In support of the NMCPHC mission, the Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW) department provides innovative and evidence-based health promotion and wellness programs and services that facilitate readiness and resilience, prevent illness and injury, hasten recovery, and promote lifelong healthy behaviors and lifestyles.



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