

Worry & Exhaustion



Tips from WING Service Members

With worry, there is no peace.

CMSgt Michelle Marrero is one of the newest members of the Comprehensive Health and Wellness (CHW) Team! She is a vital leader at the 128th Air Refueling Wing on drill weekends and during the month, she serves in a contract position as a CHW Program Manager.

What preventative things do you do in your life to keep your stress and worry at bay?

I believe that 'vitamin nature' is an important part of prevention. I try to spend 30 min a day outside. This sounds like a lot, but I break it up throughout the day, ten minutes in the morning, afternoon, and evening. As the weather gets cooler, I have a tendency to want to stay inside, but sunlight and a brisk walk helps reset my mind throughout the day. I also meditate on a regular basis or use a breathing exercise throughout my day. My favorite meditation is following the inhale and exhale with my mind. Staying focused on my breath allows my nervous system to regulate and rest. My favorite breathing exercise is square breathing, the best part is that this can be done anywhere at any time.

How do you maintain balance within your life?

Planning is key. As a Service Member, contractor, business owner, mom and wife, I can be pulled in many different directions. I carve time out to set myself up for success. If I fail to plan, then I plan to fail. Everything that is important finds its way onto my calendar. My workouts are scheduled, and I put them on the family calendar, because I do need accountability, otherwise I can reason my way out of anytime for myself. I plan my meals for the week, and if I am going into the office I pack my meals the night before, allowing me the ability to press the snooze in the morning but not let it throw my goals out the window for the day. I also have a reminder on my phone that lets me know it is time to go to bed. Sleep is very important; it allows our body to rest and prepare for the day ahead. In the past I have struggled with going to bed because it was the only time that I had to myself, after everyone else went to bed I would stay up and mindlessly scroll social media while having the television on in the background with my favorite show. This habit began to grow and before I knew it, I was left with only a few hours of sleep and nothing to show for it but exhaustion and an inability to make sound quick decisions in the morning.

Who are the people you can talk to about your stress?

Having a community is key, it takes a village. Family and friends are a true help with emotional support. They remind me of different ways of looking at things and to take the time to slow down and take care of myself. I also have the help of a DPH, health coach, and a therapist for those things in my life that I need support with expertise. There was a time when I was very averse to using these more formal lines of support, but once I started using the resources, I realized how helpful they are. It strengthened me as a person and my relationships within my life. It also Alleviated the stress on my friends and family, no longer did they feel that they needed to help me solve all my challenges.

Worry doesn't take away tomorrow's troubles, it takes away today's peace

Do you find yourself thinking repeatedly, “What if...?”

Are you worrying about anticipated problems and things going awry?

By CMSgt Michelle Marrero

Worry ultimately gives way to anxiety or unease. It allows one's mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles that have yet to occur, causing stress on the mind and the body. If you are constantly under stress, you can have physical symptoms such as headaches, an upset stomach, high blood pressure, chest pain, or sleep problems.

Managing your anxiety:

- Take a deep breath
- Focus on meaningful activities
- Surround yourself with positive people
- Focus on the right now
- Use positive self-talk
- Start a gratitude journal
- Make time for your hobbies or interests
- Eat well-balance meals
- Get plenty of sleep
- Exercise regularly; even taking a quick walk can help clear your mind
- Avoid or limit caffeine
- Take time to notice what is working well in your life



CMSgt Michelle Marrero is a behavioral health expert, WING member and one of the newest members of the CHW team.

Alternate Nostril Breathing:

Breathing exercises can calm the mind and the body. The benefit of alternate nostril breathing is that it aligns the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This style of breathing may help to reduce anxiety and allow you to be more mindful of the present moment.

To begin, find a comfortable seat.

Hover your right hand over your nose with your thumb near the right nostril and your ring finger near the left.

Begin by closing off the right nostril and breathing in through the left

Cover the left nostril breath out through the right

In through the right

Out through the left

This is one round

Complete 5-9 rounds.

For a recorded example: <https://youtu.be/6JqgvnCiNcE>



Communication Tool Kit

PHYSICAL, MENTAL, SPIRITUAL, SOCIAL, FINANCIAL



December (Managing Worry & Concern)

Vignette: Congratulations! You were recently promoted in the Wisconsin National Guard. As part of the promotion, you are now taking on new responsibilities. You're enjoying the unit, however, you find that the anticipated annual training schedule coming up will add additional hours of planning with your leadership team in addition to drill weekends. You're someone who schedules your time spent outside of the home to ensure your significant other has access to a shared vehicle. You foresee that he/she won't be happy if you change the days you'll be going into the Armory/Air Base. You've both recently asked your supervisors to work opposite shifts in order to free up the car for both of you to use. You're both enjoying the new hours, but slowly you begin to find that having only one vehicle and not having the freedom to get from A to B at a moment's notice is making it tough to fulfill your WING responsibilities. Your military leader is also new to the position. He lacks confidence to make recommendations and is frequently asking you for advice and impromptu meetings before his own leadership meetings. Wanting to be a team player, you find yourself agreeing to frequently meet with him, often multiple times the week leading up to drill, and working after hours. You notice that you and your partner are starting to be short with one another and the newly agreed upon "driving schedule" isn't always working with one car. When you're at your civilian job, you're often concerned about being taken advantage of by your military leader. Your supervisor has commented that you are distracted and missing details. You want to do a good job for your unit and show that you can provide great ideas for the planning team, but you're also finding yourself constantly worrying about when the phone will ring. Your partner has also commented that you no longer appear to be "as excited" about the promotion and new role as you were a few months ago. What are some ways you can cope with some of these stressors you are experiencing?

- A) Keep juggling and let your partner and employer know you'll do better and you're just 'adjusting' to the new role.
- B) Stop answering the phone when the military leader calls you and hope that he will stop asking for your input.
- C) Connect with a Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC).
- D) Talk with your military leader and let him know that you are feeling some pressure with juggling home, work and drill schedules. Be open with your partner regarding your concerns and the need for transportation more frequently than originally planned out.
- E) Stay after hours with your military associates and talk about how you're struggling with the extra hours for drill hoping someone can help.

BEST answer: C & D! Talk openly with your leadership and your partner. They will gain a better understanding of where your concerns are coming from and it's the first step to finding a solution to the situation. MFLCs are also a great resource for providing problem solving ideas and support to you and your family. Do not be afraid to ask for help!

DISCUSSION Q&A:

Can you relate to the scenario above in any way? What might be some concerns with having that conversation with the Platoon Sergeant?

Why is ignoring the situation not the best option?

How would you approach this conversation with your Platoon Sergeant? With your partner?

At what point would you reach out to a behavioral health expert or a Chaplain for additional assistance?

What are some coping techniques that you use when you find yourself worrying or concerned with an issue?

December (Managing Worry & Concern)

Takeaways:

- ♦ It is important to establish boundaries for yourself and being OK to say “No.” Particularly when a supervisor, friend, family member, colleague or whomever is relying on you at the expense of your mental health. If you have a good relationship with your chain of command, they will respect your decision, but it is important to have the conversation with them.
- ♦ Prioritize daily and weekly responsibilities and identify how much time each week you need to designate to those tasks. This can help you understand what needs to come first when taking on new obligations.
- ♦ Write down what you’re concerned about so you can eliminate things that may really aren’t an issue. This can go a long way to reducing the feeling of being overwhelmed by a perceived “mountain of issues.” A list of concerns can guide you with discussions with those involved. This is also a great way to stay on topic if you’re nervous about the conversation you need to have with others!
- ♦ Mental Health days are key and can consist of anything that works for you. This could include: date night with your significant other, finally catching up on household chores, meal prepping, taking your dog to the park or hanging out with a friend for a few hours. Anything that allows your mind and body to decompress!
- ♦ Avoid using alcohol and other substances when trying to “do it all with a smile.” Alcohol is a negative coping skill and can lead to a slippery slope of becoming reliant on it.
- ♦ Stress is a part of life and will always be present, however there are ways to cope with daily worries. Do not be afraid to reach out to a behavioral health expert or a Chaplain if you would like ideas and/or some additional assistance managing your worry and concern.

Follow-Up Resources:

- CDC Coping with Worry-<https://www.cdc.gov/howrightnow/index.html>
- Army Director of Psychological Health (DPH): 1-877-504-2358
- Air Director of Psychological Health (DPH): Patricia Weiner (608-234-8820) and Emily Barrett (608-400-5275)
- Chaplain: 608-630-1660
- Army Military and Family Life Counselor ([ACS :: Ft. McCoy :: US Army MWR](#))
- Air Military & Family Life Counselor: Alicia Zenk, 608-215-3037
- Soldier and Family Readiness Number: 1-800-292-9464 (Option 1)

Feedback from the Field:

Thank you from the Operation Resilience Team!

We know your time is valuable and we want to thank you for setting aside some time to talk over these topics. Your feedback is highly encouraged and welcomed.

We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas as to how well these discussions were implemented as well as how well they were received. For feedback, suggestions or even any success stories that you would like to share, a survey can be completed at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SMSD2021>
