



# MIND OVER CYBER

MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES GUIDE

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OFFICE MEET YOGA



## MIND OVER CYBER

Mind Over Cyber is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that focuses on promoting mental well-being and preventing burnout among cybersecurity professionals. We create events to teach accessible mindfulness techniques to help defenders manage stress, improve focus, and maintain good mental well-being. To achieve this goal, Mind Over Cyber collaborates with vendors to organize community events where cybersecurity practitioners can learn and apply these techniques in their daily lives and work.

This guide was designed in partnership with Office Meet Yoga to provide you with a set of resources for portable meditation exercises you can use everyday, in both your work and personal life.

**Defend Your Peace.**

# Exercises

## Breathwork

By simply putting your attention onto your breath, you tell your nervous system that it is safe to relax and you bring yourself into the present moment.

With the practices below, it's suggested to breathe through your nose. Nasal breathing slows the flow of the breath, allowing for a longer window of time for maximum oxygen absorption.

## Boxed Breathing (aka Square Breathing)

A technique to create a rhythmic, even pattern to breathing. It is used by first responders to refocus attention as you count to four, calming your nervous system, and decreasing stress in your body.

- Inhale to the count of 4 through your nose
- Pause, hold the breath for a count of 4
- Exhale to the count of 4 through your nose
- Pause, hold the breath out for the count of 4
- Repeat for 6 rounds; notice how you feel and repeat

## Upward Counting Breath

A technique for anchoring attention on the present-moment experience of the breath through counting.

- Inhale to the count of 2, exhale to the count of 3
- Inhale to the count of 3, exhale to the count of 4
- Repeat until the inhale is the count of 6, exhale to the count of 7
- Practice for 6 rounds; notice how you feel and repeat



## 4/6 Breath

A rhythmic technique where the exhale is extended by 2 counts to signal to the nervous system that it's safe to relax.

- Inhale on the count of 4, exhale on the count of 6.
- Practice for 6 rounds; notice how you feel and repeat

## Belly Breathing (aka Diaphragmatic breathing)

Deep breathing into the abdomen stimulates the vagus nerve, and halts the body's stress response. It reduces blood pressure and heart rate while improving relaxation.

- Sit or lie in a comfortable place. Close your eyes.
- Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen. The bottom hand should do the moving. The top hand should remain still or only move as the bottom hand moves.
- **Inhale through your nose** for about 4 seconds, feeling your abdomen expand. (You may feel slight tension the first few times you inhale.)
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds.
- Exhale very slowly and steadily **through your mouth** for about 6 seconds. The mouth should be relaxed.
- Repeat for 5-15 minutes.



# Meditations

## Mindful 2 Minute Check In

Practice this several times a day. Set your phone alarm every few hours to make this a habit. Most of us move through our day on autopilot. This question asks us to look a little deeper at how you can support your mind, body and spirit throughout the day.

- **Sit** and close your eyes, relax your jaw, and take a few deep breaths with an open mouth exhale to allow your mind/body/emotions to settle.
- **Ask**, “What do I need right now?”
- **Answer**: I need a break, to get up and move my body, to relax my eyes, to drink some water, to listen to music, rest or sleep, to eat some healthy food, a warm shower, touch of another person, companionship of a pet, to go on a run, to stretch my body etc.
- **Do** follow up immediately on what you need. Then return to what you were doing.



## 5 Minute Morning Meditation

Invite in the qualities that you want to embody that day such as: integrity, flexibility, confidence, connection, problem solving, collaboration and patience.

Energy flows where attention goes. Our lives are controlled by what we focus on. Since the mind has a negative bias, we need to retrain it to invite in positive feelings so the body can feel these positive emotions.

- Sit and close your eyes, relax your jaw, and take a few deep breaths with an open mouth exhale to allow your mind/body/emotions to settle.
- Slow your breathing. Breathe in for a count of 5, and out for a count of 5 for a few rounds then let your breath return to normal. As you sit, ask yourself what quality you want to embody that day. Sit with that word and feel it in your body.
- Try to return to this quality throughout the day.



## Mind/Body Scan

Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens. When you practice mindfulness, your thoughts tune into what you're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

- Close your eyes, observe the sensations of the breath
- Scan the common places that hold or grip in the body: jaw, shoulders, stomach, throat or temples. Relax them.
- Without judgment - observe 3 components of thought:
- Content - what is the narrative? Same or different narratives?
- Tone - the mood or the feeling of; or quality of
- Pace - the speed in which it's moving; is it focused on one thing, or narrative or jumping from place to place?
- Next, do a quick body scan starting with your feet, and make your way up to the top of your head. Notice any sensations or tightness. Breathe into the places that feel restricted or tight with an intention of softening.



# Food

Food is the single most important thing you can control when it comes to your health. Plan ahead when you can. It will set you up to not reach for junk food.

- Choose foods such as proteins, vegetables and healthy fats.
- Shop the perimeter of the grocery store. The perimeter tends to be where the “real” food is located - produce, fresh vegetables, fish, meat, poultry, and dairy. Write down what you eat on a journal or piece of paper. This will help you understand your unconscious behaviors and patterns that are no longer serving you. These tend to be your auto-pilot tendencies. Replace them with healthier choices.
- Healthy Protein Snacks hard boiled eggs, edamame, almond/peanut butter, greek yogurt, almonds, trail mix, tuna, nuts, pumpkin seeds, veggies, cottage cheese, apples with almond butter, and grandola.





# Mental Health

## On average we have 70K thoughts a day!

**We are not our thoughts**, many of us are living in our head, believing all the thoughts or content that the mind produces. It's the mind's job to produce thoughts and content. Many of our thoughts are useless, unimportant thoughts that pass through the mind with great speed. It's just like being at a very busy train station or airport terminal, where a great number of people come and go. Believing and identifying with these thoughts can cause stress, anxiety and other mental health problems.

Thoughts are at the core of most suffering. Often when we are stuck in our thoughts, we miss the present moment in front of us. When stuck in our thoughts, we are living in the past of the future. The breath, is our most organic approach to managing stress will bring us back to the present moment.

### **Additional Stress Management Strategies:**

- Getting regular physical activity
- Taking breaks to unwind with yoga, exercise, cooking, gardening
- Eating healthy
- Getting enough sleep (7-8 hours)
- Practicing relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi or massage
- Keeping a sense of humor
- Spending time with family and friends
- Setting aside time for hobbies, such as reading a book, listening to music, playing an instrument, cooking, hiking
- Walk outside everyday for at least 20 minutes



## Sleep

Sleep is a function of our parasympathetic nervous system known as Rest & Digest. Often when we wake, it's because of a charged nervous system. At this point, we need to teach our body that it is safe to shift into the Parasympathetic Nervous System. The first step is to NOT lay in bed and follow our thoughts! Our thoughts will continue to charge our nervous system and maybe even take us on a wild ride.

### Ideas for a nourishing bedtime routine:

- Prepare for sleep up to 2 hours or longer before your bedtime
- Dim lights in your house 30-90 minutes before bedtime
- Make sure your bedroom is dark and quiet
- Warm herbal tea
- A warm bath, shower
- Meditation, beep breathing or quiet time
- Gratitude journal
- Gentle stretching or yoga



## **What to do if you wake because of a monkey mind that won't stop:**

- Physically, get out of bed, grab your journal or a piece of paper and dump out what is on your mind. Get it out. Sit by a lamp or gentle lighting so it feels relaxing. Avoid overhead canned lighting as the lights will wake you.
- If you have a meditation practice, lay or sit in meditation and observe your thoughts and sensations without attachment or judgment. Allow your feelings to stay without judgment or attachment, with love and feel them in your body. This is to become embodied.
- Physically get out of bed and grab a book by a dim light so you feel relaxed to read and fall asleep again.

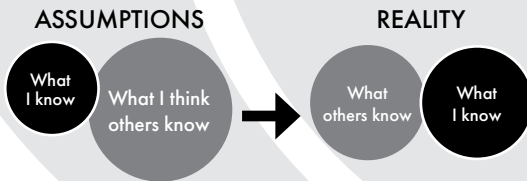


# Mental Health Hackers

Cybersecurity is a rapidly growing field, and with it comes a number of mental health challenges above and beyond our normal day to day living. We are all often under a great deal of stress, as we are responsible for protecting data, environments, and more from attackers no matter what role we may be in. This can lead to burnout, imposter syndrome, and high levels of anxiety.

## Common Mental Health Issues in Cybersecurity

- Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. One of the reasons we are at risk for burnout is because of the constant bombardment of new threats, attacks, and vulnerabilities. We sometimes feel that we “always have to be on” even at a detriment to our own health.
- Imposter syndrome is a feeling of inadequacy and insecurity, despite evidence to the contrary. We are often surrounded by highly skilled and knowledgeable people. It’s one of the amazing aspects of our community.



High stress and anxiety are common in the cybersecurity field. It is a large portion of burnout many times because our bodies aren't built to be in a constant “fight or flight” mode.

## Tips for Prevention

- **Take breaks!** It is so incredibly important to not stare at your screen(s) constantly throughout the day/week. Shifting to a majority of at-home workforce makes this even more difficult, because sometimes, work is always there. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or stressed, go do something else. Take a nap, eat a snack, listen to some music, meditate...whatever you can do to get away for a bit.
- **Exercise:** Exercise is a great way to reduce stress and anxiety. You don't necessarily have to hit the gym, but you could go for a walk, do some sit ups in the living room, or turn on a yoga channel on youtube. There are a multitude of ways to use moving as a way to relieve some of these tensions.
- **Talk to someone:** It is important to talk to someone you trust. It could be a friend or a professional. Whether you are struggling with mental health problems or not, it's never a bad idea to seek professional help. Long gone are the days when seeing a therapist is something to be ashamed of. They are professionals that can give you tools to succeed. Don't worry if it takes awhile to find someone that you work well with, it's a discovery process for many people.

**Take care of yourself:** Make sure to take care of yourself by eating healthy, getting enough sleep, and exercising. I know sometimes this is harder said than done. But just like with many things, you can start small and work towards SMART goals to establish healthy habits. Maybe you just cut out drinking your daily Pepsi or cutting down to only eating desserts on the weekends. Small changes over time make a large impact.



## Places to Talk with Fellow Peers

- Online forums: There are a number of discord and slack groups available in all different areas of security. Many of these have dedicated mental health channels. If you have a community that you are a member of that doesn't have a dedicated channel and you feel comfortable suggesting it, I'm sure many people would appreciate the addition.
- Scheduled chats with friends on the phone, over the computer, or in person: Many people have meetings to check-in on one another and scheduling this time is sometimes needed amongst our busy daily schedules.

## Resources

- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <https://www.nami.org/home>
- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): <https://afsp.org/>
- Mental Health Hackers: <https://www.mentalhealthhackers.org/resources-and-links/>
- American Psychiatric Association's Resources for Employers: <https://workplacementalhealth.org/>
- Mental Health First Aid: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

Mental health is an increasingly important issue for not only cybersecurity professionals, but everyone. By being aware of the signs of mental health problems and taking steps to prevent them, we all improve our mental health and well-being. Lastly and most importantly, it's never too late. Everyone struggles and you're not alone. Reach out and ask for help.

You can call 988 for the National Suicide & Crisis Prevention Line. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones.



Make a tax deductible  
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[www.mindovercyber.org](http://www.mindovercyber.org)