

Train your brain:

For safer decisions, pause and think

Experts tell us there are at least two ways to look at every problem:

- We can rely on our automatic, involuntary response, which is influenced by intuition and unconscious bias.
- We can engage in deliberate, analytical problem solving.

This is sometimes called “fast” and “slow” thinking, and there are advantages and disadvantages to both. For instance, if we’re about to be run over by a speeding taxi, the best response is to leap to safety. But if we’re surprised by a sudden fire, the proper response requires conscious thought.

Making safe decisions often requires that we slow down and think deliberately. This helps to counter any biases, such as assuming company leaders always know what’s right or sticking with the way things have always been done. Consider asking the following:

- What are other ways to perform this task?
- What alternatives are the safest?
- Do we have enough information to make an informed decision?
- Is any key information missing?
- Why are we doing it this way?

The following techniques also can help build resilience and increase performance, focus, and memory while reducing stress, anxiety, and fatigue.

Switch on

Ask simple questions to activate deliberate thinking:

- What’s changed since my last shift?
- How would someone else see this?
- Does this mean I’m safe?

PAUSE before acting

Perceive the situation.

Allow at least 10 seconds.

Understand before taking action.

Seek new solutions.

Evaluate if things are going as expected.

Take a walk

Focused walking, such as in a labyrinth, can induce a contemplative or meditative state of mind.

Prime for safety

Conduct a job hazard analysis or pre-task plan.

Take care of yourself

Reducing fatigue, eating a balanced diet, and managing stress can increase our capacity for deliberate thinking.

Unplug from screens

Powering down electronics provides time to reset, refresh, and refocus.

Practice mindfulness

Follow these steps for five minutes each day:

1. Sit with your back straight.
2. Take a deep breath and close your eyes.
3. Notice your natural breathing pattern but don’t change it.
4. As your mind wanders, bring your awareness back to your breathing.

