

WINNER

# Enjoying the Price of Physical Fitness

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Once heard someone say, “You have to pay the price for good physical fitness.” I must say at first glance this seems to be a pretty true statement. I have spent countless miles running, done thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of push-ups and punished my abdomen in a quest for the fabled perfect 300 APFT score.

Although the push for that perfect score is placed in our world so we can have a benchmark for success physically, I believe there is a much deeper meaning to the cold mornings spent in the dew covered grass with little more than an IPFU jacket and a pair of shorts defending us from the piercing cold of the frigid ground. The critical moment when you hear the first, “Half-right face, front-leaning rest position, move!” in basic training spurs something we as Soldiers all understand: discipline.

As one of my first sergeants has always stated, “Discipline is the core of any great unit. Without discipline nothing will get accomplished.”

As we look at the challenges we as a Recruiting Command face: mission accomplishment, well-being of our Soldiers and Future Soldiers and being a positive role model in a country that is fast approaching 40 percent obesity in our youth. Ask yourself the following question, “Do I have time to *not* maintain my physical fitness?”

The very thought crossed my mind when I arrived at my first recruiting station. Wide-eyed and ready to chase the mission I was slammed with the reality that not all applicants were going to say, “Yes,” and not every parent was going to support their child’s decision to become a warrior. I quickly found the operational tempo was faster than any unit I had been in. Physically my body changed and I must say I was not looking at the same man that scored 340s for over five years straight. I had lost a bit of that discipline that I had “Back at the Flagpole.” Soon I allowed the mission to wear on me — physically and emotionally. The hours increased. The pressure mounted. No end was in sight — 36 one-month tours! How was I to survive?

The answer came to me in the form of Staff Sgt. Jerry Shavrnock, my first station commander. He could see I went from hard charged to the verge of defeat. He said the truest words I have ever heard — “You ENJOY the price of good health, you don’t pay for it.” With that he sat me down and counseled me on something I knew was important all along — physical fitness and discipline. He assisted me with developing a workout program I could maintain in the recruiting environment.

Since that day USAREC has changed. The commanding general placed emphasis on the whole Soldier concept, and we (as NCOs always do) drove forward with “all commands from the tower.” We have emphasized physical fitness and brought it screaming back to our formations. We are walking the walk so to say.

So the question is posed, “Why is physical fitness important to us and our unit?” Here are a few of the answers that I think we can all share and agree upon.

- It builds the team.
- It reinforces the discipline that is at the core of our organization.
- It physically and mentally readies the Soldier for the challenges of the operational environment whether in combat or garrison.
- And last but not least, it presents us as Soldiers to the American people as worthy defenders. It molds their belief in us simply by the confidence in our walk. It is the sight of a lean, square-jawed infantryman standing guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It is the reason why young American boys and girls pull on our pants legs and give us that cock-eyed salute.

The importance of physical fitness stems from something much deeper than an APFT score. It is the image that represents this country: our strength, our determination and our willingness to serve this great nation. Although the price paid for good physical fitness can be grueling and gut wrenching, the return can only be cherished by those willing to enjoy the cost.



# Importance of Health, Fitness Needs Little Explanation

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There are two distinct areas of personal health and fitness that exist both in the U.S. Army and the civilian sector. The first area, physical health and fitness, has been an important aspect of serving in the military since King Leonidas I led his fearless troops into battle on the plains of Thermopylae. The second area, mental health and fitness, has become more important as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq produce more and more war weary Soldiers.

The importance of physical health and fitness needs very little explanation. When we were all youngsters and our mother told us we were not allowed to leave the dinner table until we ate our peas, it was not because she enjoyed torturing us. It was because eating your vegetables and living a healthy lifestyle is essential to leading a long, productive life. Stay healthy and fit and lead from the front. Be sedentary and careless with your health and you will regret it as you get older. In the Army the importance of being healthy and fit is even more paramount.

One cannot deploy to a theater overseas in poor physical shape. In the middle of a desert in Iraq with an unserviceable vehicle and no back up around for several clicks is the wrong place to wish you had run a bit farther every day.

In USAREC, because of our collective geographical isolation, the responsibility of maintaining good physical fitness often falls on the shoulders of the individual Soldier. With the different activities each recruiter must do, physical fitness can easily become a low priority. In the last few years, USAREC has provided gym or YMCA memberships to all members of the command. All recruiters, regardless of location and personal situation can find a few moments, at least, each day to hit the gym and run a few laps or lift some weights. Good physical fitness is extremely important, not only in keeping with the standards of the Army, but also in keeping your sanity. Those that participate in some manner of daily physical exercise enjoy numerous benefits. Daily exercise decreases the risk of heart disease and type II diabetes. It also increases muscle strength and helps us control our weight.

Today we are in our comfortable, climate controlled offices reading the latest issue of the Recruiter Journal. Tomorrow we may be in the middle of a firefight in Afghanistan with only our physical and mental faculties to ensure our survival and, even more importantly, the survival and well being of those young troops who look to us to lead and protect them.

Mental health issues are becoming more and more important in recent years. The taboo associated with admitting a problem is one of the largest detriments we as an Army face. In the genre of "things you don't talk about at parties," mental health issues rank higher than politics, sex and religion. No one wants to

admit to the perceived weakness that many believe is associated with having a mental issue. In today's world of multiple deployments, we cannot and must not ignore the importance of being mentally fit and healthy.

Mental health can be affected in several ways. Some are more obvious than others. Obviously a Soldier who has just returned from a deployment and is now in the strange and fast paced world of USAREC should be monitored closely. We cannot forget, however, about the 79R out in the middle of nowhere by him or herself with little or no support system. When we were all stationed at a base we could go to the nearest court and play a game of basketball with whatever Soldiers happened to be around, thereby improving both our physical and mental health. In USAREC, we sometimes find ourselves on the outside looking in on small, tightly-knit communities who may or may not appreciate our presence.

Mental health can be more difficult to maintain than physical health. The nearest scale and tape test as well as the next PT test will give you a fair assessment of your physical health. What is the measuring stick in regards to mental health?

How does one know when his or her problems require attention? The Army and USAREC are taking steps to improve their ability to identify those Soldiers who may need some help. I applaud their efforts. In my humble opinion one Soldier needlessly lost to a treatable mental health issue is one Soldier too many.

The question was "Why is maintaining a good personal/unit health and fitness program important to Soldiers?" The answer is greater than all of us as individuals. Maintaining your health and fitness may not be a priority to you. It is, however, a concern for the Soldiers who follow your lead and look to you for guidance. How effective is an overweight, out-of-shape station commander who counsels a Soldier for failing to meet Army standards? The days of

hiding behind production have passed. We are all individually responsible for our appearance as well as our level of both physical and mental health. If you are in a leadership position you are responsible for your fitness as well as the fitness of those you lead. The Army and USAREC have instituted several different resources available to all of us for help. At the end of the day I have always believed in an old saying: "The Lord helps those who help themselves." When you finish reading this article, put down the Recruiter Journal. Go for a run and stretch your legs. Call your fellow recruiter who works in the middle of nowhere and is having trouble with the numbers. Tell him or her that they are a valuable part of the team and offer to help them in whatever way you can. Institute a method to improve your mental and physical health each day. When you are retired and enjoying your golden years, you can look back and appreciate the fact that you were active and maintained a healthy lifestyle in your younger years. Or you could be dead. The choice seems easy to me.

