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GET FIT FOR THE ARMY
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WHY YOUR FITNESS MATTERS TO THE ARMY

It might seem obvious, but it is worth thinking about before you start your training programme: what exactly is the point of fitness in the 21st Century?

The human race has invented machines to do just about everything for us, from washing the dishes to travelling across the country. And the Army is no different, with mechanised forces engaging the enemy with hi-tech weapon systems. So why does the Army still spend so much time on physical training? The reasons go beyond being able to march for a certain distance in a certain time or being able to lift a particular weight – they are to do with the physical and mental effects of training.

Fitness creates a standard of physical readiness. This means that, while you might never have to run for exactly 1.5 miles within 10 minutes, doing so will mentally and physically prepare you for rising to similar, less predictable challenges in the field – when your life might depend on it.

There will be times in your Army career when you are asked to perform tasks in difficult conditions, to a challenging deadline, when you are already wet, cold and tired. If you haven’t toughened up your mind and body to operate under stress then you might not be able to get the job done. There are times when you will need to use your mind to overcome the exhaustion of your body, and other occasions when you will have to rely on sheer physical strength to get you through.

All soldiers are required to function effectively in many different environmental conditions. These include intense heat, high altitude and extreme cold. Physical fitness and good health prepare the body to cope with these better. Another highly useful side-effect of exercise is that the more you move your body around, the stronger the links between your muscles and brain will become. This means that your reflexes will be sharp and you will be able to react to any unforeseen situations in a split-second.

But rising to physical challenges is not just an individual endeavour. You will be asked to operate as part of a team in the Army, and your colleagues will need to be able to call on your fitness. Being confident in your own physical ability will make you a better team player and a better soldier.

Another benefit of exercise is improved health. Exercise helps the heart, lungs and blood do their job. Because blood carries the oxygen, energy and heat that your muscles and organs need, exercise makes your body work better. Injuries are less likely to halt your progress because your muscles are better prepared for hard work and your brain is able to control them better.

So not only will getting physically fit set you up for a career in the Army, it will help you feel healthier and give you a sense of achievement as you see your performance steadily improve.

"If you haven’t toughened yourself up to operate under stress, you might not get the job done"
Learning how to be responsible for your own health and wellbeing will give you a real edge. Not only will it help you perform your duties better, but you will remain an effective part of your unit for longer and will be able to support other soldiers in doing the same.

By keeping your body healthy and ready for any challenge, you will find your training easier, see better results and help to guard against injuries. You will also need to leave room for rest and recuperation in your training schedule. This is because your muscles do not get stronger in the gym – they improve as your body repairs and grow while you are resting. So try to leave one day in between heavy sessions and make sure you get eight hours of sleep. If you really push yourself during a session, such as a 1.5-mile run, you might want to wait 48 hours before doing that exercise again.

If you do not supply your body with the nutrients and energy it needs to follow your training programme, your performance will not improve. It is vital that you eat a balanced diet – the first things on your plate should be vegetables and fruit, followed by carbohydrates like potatoes or pasta, then lean meat or other kinds of protein.

Avoid foods that are high in calories but low in nutrients, such as crisps, chocolate, fried food and alcohol. These will make you put on weight but give less useable energy.

Make sure you eat five portions of veg or fruit each day (not counting potatoes). If you eat a balanced diet you will not need to take vitamin supplements – and you will not need to go on a diet to lose weight, as the exercise will burn it off. Remember, you should also make sure you stay well hydrated before, during and after exercise.

Healthy eating

TO CUT FAT:
✔ Drink skimmed milk
✔ Replace chips with baked potatoes
✔ Eat more lean meat and fewer burgers
✔ Eat less crisps, pastries and pies

TO CUT SUGAR:
✔ Eat fruit rather than chocolate
✔ Do not add sugar to cereals
✔ Avoid fizzy drinks
✔ Eat fewer ‘ready meals’

TO ADD FIBRE:
✔ Choose wholegrain rice and pasta
✔ Eat more veg and beans
✔ Try high-fibre cereals
✔ Do not peel apples before eating them

Alcohol is bursting with calories but in a form that your muscles can’t use, so your body turns them straight into fat. If you drink too much alcohol, your body cannot process energy from food properly so it breaks down your own muscles for calories.

Avoid training during illness because exercise will undermine your immune system further, making you even more ill. Recover properly and make up for it when you start training again.

Your body repairs itself when you are asleep and burns calories, so skipping sleep will hold back your performance gains and could make you put on weight.

Smoking makes you sick. Not only does it affect your fitness, it also weakens your immune system, making you more likely to be laid up by illness.
After 4-6 weeks of a workout programme your body adapts and the exercise becomes less effective, so you have to keep changing the programme to get fitter.

Your muscles are 75 per cent water so staying hydrated before, during and after exercise means that you will stay stronger. Weigh yourself before and after a workout: the difference is the amount of water you will need to replace.

REFUELLING

While training, adapt your diet to provide the right mix of energy sources (see pages 6-7):

- **Protein:** 15%
- **Carbohydrate:** 60%
- **Fat:** 25%

**STRENGTH BUILDING**

It does not matter what sort of natural build you have – a well-designed exercise programme will soon help you to improve your muscular power.

In order to get fitter and more physically able for the challenges of Army life, you will need to improve the strength of your muscles. Depending on your genetics, your body will naturally tend towards one of three types: endomorph, ectomorph or mesomorph (see panel below).

Whatever your natural build, however, you can increase the functional strength of your muscles and improve your physical fitness through exercise. Initially, the most effective way of doing this is with your own bodyweight – after all, this is the load that you will ask your body to carry every single day.

Weight training to improve muscle strength is based around a simple process. When you lift weights you put your muscles under tension, which makes microscopic tears in the muscle fibres. Then, when your body repairs your muscles using protein from food, they also grow slightly, becoming stronger and larger.

But for this to happen, the workout you put your body through must be intense enough for your muscles to become fatigued. This is why you will repeat an exercise for a number of ‘repetitions’, then rest for one minute before doing the exercise again for the same number of repetitions. These groups of repetitions are called ‘sets’.

**INTRODUCTION**

You will need to build up your muscle strength and cardiovascular fitness for Army training – read on for how to get started.

In order to get fitter and more physically able for the challenges of Army life, you will need to improve the strength of your muscles. Depending on your genetics, your body will naturally tend towards one of three types: endomorph, ectomorph or mesomorph (see panel below).

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**BODY TYPES**

Whatever your natural build, you can increase the strength of your muscles and improve your fitness with exercise.

- **Endomorph:** Large build with broad face, wide hips, big bones, slow metabolism and a high percentage of body fat
- **Ectomorph:** Skinny build with narrow shoulders, hips and waist, small muscles, very fast metabolism and low body fat percentage
- **Mesomorph:** Muscular build with broad shoulders, small waist, low body fat percentage and fast metabolism

**DID YOU KNOW?**

After 4-6 weeks of a workout programme your body adapts and the exercise becomes less effective, so you have to keep changing the programme to get fitter.

Your muscles are 75 per cent water so staying hydrated before, during and after exercise means that you will stay stronger. Weigh yourself before and after a workout: the difference is the amount of water you will need to replace.

**REFUELLING**

While training, adapt your diet to provide the right mix of energy sources (see pages 6-7):
THE UPPER BODY
A strong upper body is vital for general fitness and the ability to take on any challenge.

The muscles in your upper body are your powerhouse, used for more than just hauling things around. You use them when running to help rotate your hips, when climbing obstacles and when balancing your own bodyweight.

Some of the following exercises have the option of using dumb-bells. You should aim to use dumb-bells eventually, but initially do the exercises without them until you are happy that you are using perfect technique, or ‘form’.

ASSISTED SIT-UP (ABOVE)
■ Lie back with knees bent and ankles supported
■ Hold your arms across your chest
■ Keep your shoulders back and neck straight
■ Brace your abdomen and sit all the way up
■ Lower yourself under control
■ Do not allow your shoulders to touch the floor

PRESS-UP
■ Keep your feet together and elbows in
■ Your body should form a straight line
■ Brace the muscles in your abdomen
■ Keeping your body straight, bend your elbows to lower your chest to within a few inches of the ground. Inhale as you lower yourself
■ Press back up, exhaling as you go

TRICEP DIP
■ Start with arms straight, and thighs level and parallel to the ground
■ Lower your body, keeping your back to the block as you do so
■ Stop before your upper arms are parallel with the floor, then press back up again

CHIN-UP
■ Hold bar with your palms facing towards you
■ Brace your abdomen then pull up with arms
■ Keep your legs together and straight
■ Pull your chest up to the bar to clear chin
■ Lower down in a controlled manner until your arms are straight

THE LOWER BODY
These powerful muscles carry you around and are the foundation of any strong body.

The squat and lunge are good exercises for the muscles in your lower body, improving your ability to lift loads as well as your running, cycling and swimming.

SQUAT (RIGHT)
■ Place feet just wider than shoulder-width apart
■ Toes pointing slightly out
■ Bend your knees and lower yourself down
■ Keep knees above toes and push hips back
■ Do not arch or round your lower back; stop when thighs are parallel with floor
■ Return to standing position

LUNGE (LEFT)
■ Place feet shoulder-width apart
■ Draw back shoulders and brace abdomen
■ Step forwards, bending front leg and back knee
■ Drive back upright with front leg

THE CORE
Vital muscles that stabilise and transmit strength between your upper and lower body

The muscles in your midsection, including your abdominals, are referred to as the ‘core’. The muscle tissue visible on the surface – the ‘six-pack’ – is actually made up of a single sheet of muscle that runs from your pelvis right up to the bottom of your ribcage, called the rectus abdominus or ‘abs’.

But the muscles that really do the work lie underneath the abs. These are vital to fitness because they stabilise and transmit strength between your upper and lower body, improving your athletic performance. The humble sit-up is still the best way to train these muscles.

DORSAL RAISE (RIGHT)
■ Lie on your front with hands by temples
■ Use your lower back muscles to lift your shoulders and chest off the floor
■ Lift slowly, do not bounce off the floor

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DORSAL RAISE (RIGHT)
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■ Use your lower back muscles to lift your shoulders and chest off the floor
■ Lift slowly, do not bounce off the floor

DID YOU KNOW?
You often make the most noticeable fitness gains within the first six weeks of taking up training and after that it gets progressively harder to improve. This is why many beginners give up when they see the improvement drop off – so stick with it.

A cold shower after your workout can help to minimise muscle aches and pains later on, because cold water numbs the area and reduces inflammation. An ice bath is even better.

Holding stretches for more than five seconds before you exercise can reduce your physical performance because this has an anaesthetic effect on muscles, effectively putting them to sleep. Save long stretches for your post-workout warm-down.
RUNNING

Every soldier needs to be able to run properly, but there is a lot more to correct technique than just putting your best foot forward.

Running fitness is a core requirement of every soldier in the Army, so it pays to get it right. The best runners make it look very easy, even though running is one of the toughest things you can ask your body to do. The trick lies in developing an efficient running style, which moves you along without wasting energy or exhausting you too quickly. If you flail your limbs around then you will waste energy and invite an injury.

Rather than going flat-out every time you run, try establishing a steady rhythm which you can maintain for the length of your workout. You can introduce some faster ‘burst’ work to push your fitness up and work your muscles but longer-distance, endurance running should form most of your training.

Follow the technique advice opposite and remember that all you need to run is a good pair of shoes.

HOW TO RUN FASTER

- Aim to improve personal best times every two weeks
- Try running flat-out for one minute then walking for one minute; repeat nine more times
- Once a week pick a steep hill and run up and down it repeatedly to work your leg muscles at different loads; if using a treadmill, just add extra incline

RUNNING TECHNIQUE

Try to keep your head up and eyes looking forward – this will create good posture and allow you time to react to obstacles ahead.
- Keep your shoulders drawn back and don’t hunch over.
- Move your arms but keep your elbows into your sides and avoid rolling your shoulders inwards.
- Brace your core muscles when you step up the pace – this area is responsible for transmitting strength to your legs.
- To run faster, maintain a high rate of foot strikes per minute rather than going for a longer stride.
- Make sure your knees and feet are moving in line so that most movement is forward rather than up and down or side to side.
- Strike the surface of the ground with your heel first, then roll off with the ball of your foot.
- Keep your upper body relaxed and regularly change hand position to avoid tensing your arms or shoulders.
- Do not swing your torso or head from side to side.
- Your hips should stay level when pedalling.
- Maintain a constant level of force all the way around each pedal stroke to avoid ‘dead spots’ in the movement.
- Keep up a high number of pedal strokes per minute (cadence) because this is more efficient.

SWIMMING AND CYCLING

Enjoyable alternatives to running and important exercises in their own right – make them an essential part of your training programme.

CYCLING

Cycling boosts your fitness and tests your reflexes. It also trains your muscles in a different way to running or swimming, setting them a new challenge. The stationary bike is a good exercise alternative in the gym.

Stick to these basic rules and you will be flying along:
- Keep your upper body relaxed and regularly change hand position to avoid tensing your arms or shoulders.
- Do not swing your torso or head from side to side.
- Your hips should stay level when pedalling.
- Maintain a constant level of force all the way around each pedal stroke to avoid ‘dead spots’ in the movement.
- Keep up a high number of pedal strokes per minute (cadence) because this is more efficient.

SWIMMING

Because you are slightly supported by the water, swimming is a great way to get fit without the repetitive impact of running.

Breaststroke is the main style used in the Army. Follow these tips when you swim:
- Keep each stroke as long as possible – you swim faster by increasing the distance of the stroke, not increasing the number of strokes per minute.
- Keep your shoulders back and try to bring your shoulder blades together at the end of each stroke.
- Brace your abdomen and try to keep your hips high in the water to avoid dragging your legs behind you.

Every soldier needs to be able to run properly, but there is a lot more to correct technique than just putting your best foot forward.
There is nothing more demoralising than working hard to get your body into shape, then picking up an injury which puts you out of action and robs you of your fitness at the same time.

You start to significantly lose your cardiovascular fitness after only two weeks, and muscle starts to break down through disuse after a mere seven days. Sadly, your endurance, strength and speed will take a lot longer to build back up again – a one-month lay-off could take you two months to recover from, or even longer if your injury needs rehabilitation. Smoking will hinder your recovery further, so it is best to cut out cigarettes completely.

With exercise injuries, prevention is just as valuable as cure – take a look at the 10 most common injuries and find out how to avoid them. If you are in doubt about an injury, seek medical advice.

Even a small interruption to your exercise programme will undermine your fitness levels – become injury-smart to avoid potential lay-offs.

**Hamstring**

**What is the problem?**
The muscles on the underside of your thigh are often torn or strained when you push off into a fast run.

**How can I avoid it?**
A damaged muscle requires ice and a period of rest, but you can prevent muscle tears by making sure you do a full 15-minute warm-up before starting your workout to make your muscles supple and ready for action.

**Ankle**

**What is the problem?**
Ankles are notorious for twists and sprains when running on uneven surfaces or changing direction quickly.

**How can I avoid it?**
Try one-legged squats to build ankle strength, and add fast direction changes into your running workout; quality running shoes will help absorb impacts.

**Lower Back**

**What is the problem?**
Lower back problems often occur when you lift a heavy weight.

**How can I avoid it?**
Make sure you keep your lower back in a neutral, unstressed position during exercise; tens your knees when picking up weights.

**Shoulder**

**What is the problem?**
The rotator cuff (the group of muscles that stabilises the shoulder) is often under-trained, making it prone to injury.

**How can I avoid it?**
Tight chest muscles can add to this problem so make sure you warm up before exercising, and do regular shoulder and chest stretches.

**Neck**

**What is the problem?**
Whenever you move your head suddenly or take an impact, the muscles in your neck can suffer damage.

**How can I avoid it?**
Hold your hand to the side of your head and, using your neck muscles to resist the pressure, move your head to the side, then front and back.

**Shin**

**What is the problem?**
Shin splints are a painful condition caused by the repetitive action of running on a hard surface with inadequate footwear.

**How can I avoid it?**
Take a break from running and swim or cycle, or replace your shoes and run on a softer surface with fewer hills; stretch your calves regularly.

**Abdomen**

**What is the problem?**
A stitch may be temporary, but when stopping for a rest is not an option it can be as incapacitating as an injury.

**How can I avoid it?**
Change your breathing pattern so that you exhale when your other leg hits the ground, stay hydrated and avoid eating large amounts before a run.

**Knee**

**What is the problem?**
The knees absorb a lot of the stress of running, which puts strain on the joints and can cause overuse injuries.

**How can I avoid it?**
Buy running shoes that are suitable for your level of running. Seek advice from a specialist running shop.

**Chest**

**What is the problem?**
Chest muscles are powerful but one side can be stronger than the other, risking muscle tears in the weaker side.

**How can I avoid it?**
Try doing uneven press-ups by resting your weaker hand on a step and doing the press-up as normal to strengthen your weaker side.

**Wrist**

**What is the problem?**
Sprained wrists are often caused by breaking a fall but they can also happen when lifting heavy weights, especially if you are untrained.

**How can I avoid it?**
Always keep your wrists locked and in line with your forearms so that any stresses pass through the wrist into the forearm and absorbed.

**Ten common exercise injuries**

Even a small interruption to your exercise programme will undermine your fitness levels – become injury-smart to avoid potential lay-offs.

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CIRCUIT TRAINING

FULL BODY WORKOUT
Circuit training is a fantastic way to rapidly push up your fitness and condition your muscles to become stronger, both at the same time. This means that you can work on your endurance, muscle strength and cardiovascular fitness all in a single workout.

Circuits alternate exercises between your upper and lower body with no rest, so that when one group of muscles gets tired you switch to using another. This means you can work at a greater intensity for longer. Because of this, the most important muscle in your body – your heart – is never let off the hook for a moment.

But it is no good expecting the circuit to do the work for you. A good rule of thumb to remember is that you should always be working at 70-85 per cent of your maximum effort during the circuit. This will keep your heart rate in the correct zone to improve your fitness.

HOW TO DO THIS CIRCUIT
This circuit can be done anywhere – at home, in a park, or even on holiday – so there is no excuse not to fit in a workout. It will hit all the muscles you will use in initial Army training (and beyond) and will increase your cardiovascular fitness. Your workout should last at least 30 minutes in total. Do the following exercises in order, taking as little rest in between them as possible.

Do as many repetitions – ‘reps’ – as you can within the repetition range, but however many you complete, do not stop halfway through. You must keep your heart rate up, so either continue with the exercise or move on to the next one. Once you have completed the circuit, rest for two or three minutes then go around again for up to four circuits.

Do the circuit as directed in the fitness programme that comes with this guide (see enclosed poster).

■ You should always check with your doctor before starting any intense exercise programme.

1) PRESS-UP
REPS: 12-20
■ Body straight
■ Arms shoulder-width apart
■ Core braced
■ Lower chest towards ground
■ Press back to start position and repeat

2) SIT-UP
REPS: 12-20
■ Lie on back with knees bent
■ Feet flat or hooked under obstacle
■ Hands across chest or by side of head
■ Belly button pulled in towards spine
■ Lift torso looking straight ahead
■ Lower and repeat

3) ONE-LEGGED SQUAT
REPS: 10-12 EACH SIDE
■ Feet together
■ Lift right foot and bend knee behind body
■ Arms out for balance
■ Bend left knee keeping heel down
■ Push back up and repeat 10-12 times
■ Swap legs and start again

4) TRICEPS DIP
REPS: 12-15
■ Palms on low chair or bench
■ Extend legs in front (legs bent and feet flat on floor will prevent stress on knees)
■ Bend elbows to lower body
■ Keep back close to chair
■ Stop when backside is close to ground
■ Push back up and repeat

5) DORSAL RAISE
REPS: 12-15
■ Lie on front
■ Fingertips touch side of head
■ Lift shoulders off floor
■ Keep hips and feet on the ground
■ Hold for one second and repeat

6) STEP-UP WITH KNEE RAISE
REPS: 15 EACH SIDE
■ Step left foot onto bench or stair
■ Lift right knee towards chest
■ Lower right leg to ground
■ Step off bench
■ Repeat with opposite leg

7) BOX LIFT
REPS: 12-20
■ Pack a box with moderate weight
■ Place by your feet
■ Bend knees and grip box
■ Lift box using legs to straighten up
■ Extend arms and place box on a raised surface
■ Pick up again and replace on ground
■ Ensure you lower by bending legs; repeat

8) TWIST SIT-UP
REPS: 12-15
■ Lie on back with knees bent
■ Feet flat or hooked under obstacle
■ Arms across chest or by side of head
■ Belly button pulled in towards spine
■ Lift torso twisting to one side
■ Lower and repeat to other side
■ Continue alternating sides

9) WALKING LUNGE
REPS: 12-20
■ Feet shoulder-width apart
■ Step forward with left foot
■ Lower torso to ground bending both knees
■ Step when right knee almost touches ground
■ Raise by pushing through legs
■ Step right foot forward; repeat

REMEMBER Before attempting this circuit, you should do the warm-up featured on the poster that comes with this booklet.
ADVENTUROUS TRAINING

The Army has access to worldwide facilities for extreme sports including climbing, kayaking, skiing and caving. This kind of training is good for developing fitness, physical courage and endurance, and the risky nature of these sports means responsible leadership skills including risk assessment are developed and tested in a challenging environment. This will give you the qualities and determination to succeed as a soldier – vital when you face the shocks and strains of being on operations.

TEAM SPORTS

Teamwork and camaraderie are two great benefits of team sport, as well as being able to keep fit and in good shape through doing something you enjoy. These sports are widely played in the Army:
- Basketball
- Cricket
- Football
- Hockey
- Netball
- Rounders
- Rugby League
- Rugby Union
- Volleyball
- for both men and women

INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

The Army will encourage you to improve your personal best or compete for fun. Boxing has a long tradition in the Army – it nurtures an esprit de corps at all levels of participation. You can enjoy these sports in the Army:
- Athletics
- Badminton
- Boxing (men and women)
- Fencing
- Golf
- Squash
- Swimming
- Tennis
- also played as a team sport
- **teams also compete across the Army

WINTER SPORTS

Thanks to access to top-class facilities around the world, Army soldiers can take part in a wide range of winter sports, including:
- Snowboarding
- Skiing
- Luge
- Bobsleigh
- Skeleton

MARTIAL ARTS

An emphasis on discipline and controlled aggression make these sports a useful pursuit for Army soldiers:
- Judo
- Karate
- Taekwondo
- Kickboxing

THE BENEFITS OF SPORT

Army fitness is not just about assault courses, marches and gym work. Sport is an essential and integral part of Army life and it is actively encouraged and supported, regardless of whether you are playing for fun or aiming to compete in the Olympic Games. Popular sports in the Army include the following…
“THE ARMY GIVE YOU THE TRAINING YOU NEED TO GET FIT AND STAY FIT”

The British Army wholeheartedly supports the principle of equality of opportunity in employment. We are opposed to all forms of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic background, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief or age. We are committed, wherever practicable, to recruiting and maintaining a workforce which broadly reflects the UK population we serve. We have a strict code of conduct that ensures zero tolerance of bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation on any grounds.

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