

UNFIT TO SERVE

OBESITY AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY ARE IMPACTING NATIONAL SECURITY



THE PROBLEM

Approximately **1 in 5 children** and **2 in 5 adults** in the United States have obesity.



Just over **1 in 3 young adults** aged 17-24 is too heavy to serve in our military.

Among the young adults who meet weight requirements, **only 3 in 4** report physical activity levels that prepare them for challenges in basic training.



Consequently, only 2 in 5 young adults are both weight-eligible and adequately active.

“The military has experienced increasing difficulty in recruiting soldiers as a result of physical inactivity, obesity, and malnutrition among our nation’s youth. Not addressing these issues now will impact our future national security.”

Mark Hertling, Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (Retired)

INELIGIBLE TO SERVE



In 2018, 71% of young people in the United States would not be able to join the military if they wanted to.

3 most common reasons young people are ineligible.



Overweight or obesity



Educational deficits



Criminal or drug abuse record

Individuals in the 17-24 age range account for 90% of military applicants.

OBESITY IMPAIRS MILITARY READINESS



19% of active-duty service members had obesity in 2020, up from 16% in 2015

These individuals are less likely to be medically ready to deploy. Between 2008 and 2017, active-duty soldiers had more than 3.6 million musculoskeletal injuries. One study found that active-duty soldiers with obesity were 33% more likely to get this type of injury.

“Fit and healthy service members are vitally important to the military because lives and our national security are at stake.”

General Richard E. Hawley, U.S. Air Force (Retired)



OBESITY AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IS COSTLY



\$1.5
BILLION

The Department of Defense (DOD), our nation's largest employer, spends about **\$1.5 billion annually in obesity-related health care costs** for current and former service members and their families, as well as costs to replace unfit personnel.

Lost workdays due to overweight and obesity for active-duty military personnel is **658,000 days per year**. This costs the Department of Defense **\$103 million per year**.

658K
DAYS PER YEAR



Physical inactivity is associated with costly basic training discharge across the services.

MAKING STATES AND COMMUNITIES HEALTHIER CAN HELP BUILD A STRONG NATION

States and communities can impact the health and well-being of current and future service members by:



Promoting community designs that support inclusive, safe, and accessible places for people to be physically active in communities with high populations of service members.



Increasing the availability of healthier foods and beverages on military bases and in the surrounding communities where many services members live.

“If we don't work to build a healthy foundation for today's young people, both the military and our nation will pay the price tomorrow.”

Richard R. Jeffries, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired) and former Medical Officer of the U.S. Marine Corps

WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

CDC and its partners, including the National Association for Chronic Disease Directors, are working together to create healthy communities that support service member recruitment, readiness, and retention by:



Connecting military communities with state and local public health experts to identify and tailor strategies that can prevent chronic disease associated with poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and obesity.

Identifying opportunities to implement strategies that can help prevent health risk behaviors among service members and their families.

Educating DOD providers (e.g., clinicians, family programs) to better connect service members with national and state public health resources.

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U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:
Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

