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Physical Fitness and Resilience

A Review of Relevant Constructs, Measures, and Links to Well-Being

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Physical fitness, as it relates to the concept of Total Force Fitness (TFF), is defined as a set of health or performance-related attributes relating to the activities and condition of the body. Key resilience factors, or constructs that are associated with successfully coping with stress and strain, include both work-related and health-related physical fitness. Work-related physical fitness activities are those that increase an individual’s ability to meet the physical demands of a specific job or job-related task, whereas health-related activities are those associated with reduced morbidity, the onset of chronic conditions (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes), and mortality.

In general, science is moving away from fitness standards based on population norms (e.g., percentiles) to those based on health-related outcomes. Thus, most of this report focuses on physical activity, given its importance for overall physical health. Physical activity can provide considerable benefits to both physical and mental health and can buffer the negative effects of stress. It is important to note that physical activity includes more than aerobic activities. It can also include such activities as walking, yoga, bowling, dancing, and gardening, and these activities can be very beneficial for sedentary, injured/ill, obese, and exercise-averse populations. In fact, those who are less fit may see even greater benefits from physical activity than those who are more fit.

Interventions to promote physical fitness are clustered in three areas: informational approaches, behavioral and social approaches, and environmental and policy approaches. Informational approaches are designed to motivate, promote, and maintain behavior primarily by targeting cognition and knowledge about physical activity and its benefits. Behavioral and social approaches are designed to foster the development of behavioral management skills and modify the social environment to support changes in behavior. And environmental and policy approaches aim to increase opportunities to be physically active within the community. Ultimately, any policy or program aimed at increasing physical activity should recognize that fitness habits are the result of demographic (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity), psychological, lifestyle, and environmental factors. The decision to exercise and to maintain an exercise program often depends on a number of the factors, so an intervention with a single focus may not be as effective as a multifaceted approach.