

PREVENTION IN ACTION

MAINTAINING TOTAL FITNESS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

FOCUS ON YOUR OVERALL WELLNESS TO NAVIGATE SEASONAL STRESSORS

The holidays are considered one of the most meaningful times of the year when people often spend time with family and friends. But this time can also be a stressor that influences the overall well-being of Marines and their families.

Incorporating checks and balances into our daily lives helps us maintain physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness.

Maintaining physical fitness during the holiday season can be difficult due to schedule changes, travel, and other factors.

Look for ways to stay consistent by including family members or friends in physical activities or participating in a fitness challenge with others.

Physical activity becomes a shared experience that bolsters mental and social fitness by decreasing anxiety and depression associated with stress.

Semper Fit programs aboard installations play a significant role in providing various resources and support throughout the holidays.

Fitness centers and the Single Marine Program are particularly beneficial for those who are unable to spend time with their families.

The Single Marine Program helps Marines stay engaged and connect with others, thereby improving social, mental, and personal spiritual well-being.

If holiday gatherings become overwhelming, take time for yourself. Talk to friends, journal, meditate, or pray with a focus on gratitude rather than the pressures and stress of gifts.

Set individual goals before the holidays that include making time for self-reflection.

Create stress-management habits such as getting a good night's sleep (seven to nine hours



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per night), eating nutritious food, and staying hydrated.

Disconnect from stress-inducing activities, such as excessive news consumption.

If stressed, take the time to engage in activities that lower stress levels, such as working out, spending time in nature, reflecting on thoughts and feelings, or trying focused breathwork.

[Conscious breathing](#) has been

shown to benefit physical and mental health. It regulates the nervous system, reduces stress, and improves mental focus, self-esteem, performance, and creativity.

Semper Fit's Warrior Athlete Readiness and Resilience's strength and conditioning experts designed a [fitness program](#) you can try out this holiday season.

Make Holiday Connections and Share Joy As You Celebrate

The holidays can be a wonderful time of year filled with festive music, decorations, and family gatherings that foster holiday cheer and togetherness.

For those deployed or geographically separated, the season can be challenging, but meaningful connections can still make the holidays special and joyful.

Staying Connected during the Holidays

1. Keep family traditions or create new ones and form lasting bonds. Start traditions with friends if you're unable to be with family during the holidays.



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2. Spend time together in unique ways.

Use social media or video chatting to stay connected to loved ones, or share recorded video messages throughout the holiday season. Make holiday cards to inspire creativity. Host holiday parties and play

dates for children.

3. Celebrate with friends, neighbors, or fellow Marines. Plan a volunteer activity such as Toys for Tots or visits to senior citizen centers. A Friendsgiving meal strengthens social bonds and shows gratitude for supportive networks relied upon throughout the year.

4. Recharge and reflect on the upcoming year. Take advantage of holiday downtime for quiet, personal reflection. Use this time to review successes and set new goals for the

VOLUNTEERING AS A FAMILY BUILDS TOTAL FITNESS

Marine Corps families face unique challenges, from frequent relocations to deployments, which can sometimes strain family connections.

Volunteering together can be a powerful way to reinforce family bonds, build resilience, and make a meaningful impact on your community.

Volunteering offers families a chance to work together toward a common goal, reinforcing Marine Corps Force Total Fitness domains — social, spiritual, mental, and physical fitness.

Volunteering allows Marine families to build relationships with local organizations and strengthen their social fitness by establishing meaningful connections in their new locations.

The holidays offer many different volunteer opportunities that will lift your spirits and make a difference in the community. Local food banks host holiday food drives, senior centers welcome volunteers to visit and sing or read to residents, and it's always fun to make holiday cards for those who are deployed or staying in the barracks.

As a family, identify a cause that resonates with all family members. Next, explore local and military-related service opportunities through installation [volunteer coordinators](#),



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[Child and Youth Programs](#), or community centers.

After each volunteer experience, take the time to reflect on what you accomplished,

how it felt, how you've grown; reinforcing the positive spiritual and mental impact to encourage continued involvement.

Establish a family volunteer schedule to make service a consistent part of your family life, setting an example for younger members and strengthening your family bond.

JOY

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upcoming year. Rest, visit your installation gym or recreation center, or reconnect with hobbies.

5. Practice gratitude for loved ones. Spend time writing letters or calling friends and family, thanking them for their love and support. Gratitude helps you refocus on what you have, instead of what you don't.

Contact Volunteer Management or the [Single Marine Program](#) for more information on volunteer activities.

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The United States Marine Corps' Marine & Family Programs Division publishes Prevention in Action each quarter.

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KEEP SPIRITS BRIGHT WITH LOW-RISK DRINKING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

It's that time of the year when friends and families gather around a large table sharing a home-cooked meal.

In the background is the sound of a parade or football game. In this moment, laughter, family, friends, peace, and love are the focus.

Unfortunately, not everyone experiences these peaceful and joyous holiday moments. For many, this time of the year brings varying levels of stress, family tension, and holiday anxiety. This is especially true for families struggling with alcohol misuse.

If you find yourself in this situation, here are some tips to help:

• **Start the conversation before the holiday.**

Engage in family discussions about alcohol use and remove spiked foods or alcoholic beverages at family gatherings throughout the year.

• **Practice active and reflective listening.**

Engage in the conversation and acknowledge the feelings expressed by family members before sharing your own.

• **Address family conflicts with care.**

Discussing concerns about alcohol misuse in a respectful and positive way can result in stronger and healthier family bonds.

• **Encourage open communication with**



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family and friends about alcohol use. Not talking about it can deliver the wrong message and lead to misunderstandings.

• **Reflect on past conflicts.** Learning from previous challenges decreases the likelihood of repeating harmful behaviors and interactions.

• **Build family connections.** Engage in positive activities that don't always involve alcohol.

• **Emotional awareness you identify emotions you or others may be experiencing at any given time.** Alcohol can be a barrier to connecting emotionally.

• **Support each other.** Encourage family members or friends by suggesting they meet with a professional, abstaining from drinking when spending time together, and engaging in activities that don't involve drinking.

For more information, please contact your [Substance Assessment and Counseling Center \(SACC\)](#). The SACC offers a variety of education, prevention, and non-medical counseling services that can promote individual and operational readiness for Marines, attached service members, and their adult dependents.

Keep More in Your Wallet During the Holidays

The holiday season is a time for joy and celebration, but it can also put a strain on your finances. Between gift-giving, festive parties, and travel expenses, it's easy to overspend.

Here are some tips on keeping more in your wallet during the holiday season:

1. Create a holiday budget and stick to it.

Break it down into categories such as gifts, decorations, travel, and entertainment. Set limits for each category and stick to them. Start your shopping early to avoid last-minute stress and higher prices.

2. Take advantage of sales and



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discounts. Use coupons, and shop during sales events like Black Friday or Cyber Monday.

3. Consider alternative gift ideas.

Personal gifts like baked goods or

crafts can be more meaningful and often cost less. Stretch your budget by setting spending limits or drawing names to exchange gifts.

4. Plan your travel wisely. Book

flights and accommodations early to secure the best rates. If possible, use loyalty points or travel rewards to offset some of the costs.

5. Host potlucks. Instead of hosting an extravagant holiday party, consider a potluck where guests bring dishes to share. Plan free activities like game nights or movie marathons.

Saving money during the holidays is all about planning, budgeting, and making smart choices.

Contact the [Personal Financial Management Program](#) for free financial education on a variety of topics, including budgeting.

Encourage Your Kids to Share More with You

“How was your day?” Fine.

“How’d you do on your book report?” Fine.

“Would you like pizza tonight?” Fine.

Want to go beyond fine? Here are some tips to help your child open up:

Set an example. Talk about your thoughts, feelings, needs, and more to guide children in ways to express themselves appropriately.

Model healthy self-expression. Discuss why you are feeling happy, sad, or angry, or use a feelings chart to make confusing emotions more understandable.

Create a ritual. Identify a time, whether at dinner or before bed, to discuss the highs and lows of their day. This may create opportunities for open-ended questions, nudging them into opening up about their experiences and emotions.

Seize opportunities. Like adults, kids sometimes need time to process their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Be ready to listen when they are ready to share.

Ask questions or crack a joke that catches your child off guard. “If you could only wear one color for the rest of your life, what would it be?” or “what did one eye say to the other eye? Between us, something smells.” You may get a funny look or half smile, but the response will always be more than fine.

Occasionally, you may still get one-word responses, and that’s OK! Continually showing interest in your children’s life is important to their growth and development.

Visit Military OneSource for content as you continue to develop a healthy relationship with adolescents. Check out your [Exceptional Family Member Program](#) and [Child and Youth Programs](#) offices for more resources.

THE FOUR STAGES OF SLEEP

The science is accurate that the average adult needs seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Every night, you go through all stages of the sleep cycle multiple times. Going through full cycles of sleep is key to getting restorative sleep. If you wake up in the middle of the night, you are disrupting your sleep cycle and starting the cycle over.

Multiple wake-ups could mean you are having multiple sets of incomplete sleep cycles. This can make it more difficult to make it through your next day.

STAGE 1

Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) Cycle 1

Transition period between wakefulness and sleep. This traditionally lasts about 5-10 minutes.

STAGE 2

Non-Rapid Eye Movement (NREM) Cycle 2

Body temperature starts to drop; heart rate begins to slow. Brain starts to produce sleep spindles. This stage of sleep lasts about 20 minutes.

STAGE 3

Slow Wave Sleep Cycle

Muscles relax, blood pressure and breathing rate drop, deepest sleep occurs. Usually lasts about 20-40 minutes. This stage of sleep is most restorative when it comes to bodily recovery. If you want to be able to do high level physical training deep sleep is paramount.

STAGE 4

Rapid Eye Movement Sleep (REM)

Brain becomes more active; body becomes relaxed and immobilized. Dreams occur and the eyes move rapidly. Consuming alcohol too close to bed can disrupt REM sleep and negatively affect Memory, Dreaming, creativity, and happiness.

SOCIAL FITNESS

Poor sleep can make you moody and reactive in social interactions, leading to conflicts and misunderstandings.

SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Lack of sleep can affect your sense of purpose and character, leading to risky decisions.

MENTAL FITNESS

Inadequate sleep can make difficult situations harder to handle, as your mental capacity is reduced.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Insufficient sleep can lead to a decline in physical performance and recovery, making workouts unbearable and affecting overall fitness.

To learn more about sleep, contact your local **Semper Fit** Sleep Coach for information on how you can make sleep your superpower.

WARRIOR ATHLETE
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PREVENTION RESOURCES

DoD resources and tools: Check out the Department of Defense’s www.prevention.mil. It includes information about resources, tools, research, and policy.

Marine Corps Interactive Suicide Prevention and Mental Fitness Resource: This online

resource provides suicide prevention and skill-building information for all Marines and their families.

This is a resource users can come back to as often as they need it. Go to www.usmc-mccs.org/mfitness.

MCCS website: Visit the Marine

Corps Community Services website (www.usmc-mccs.org) to find information about programs and resources and read articles that offer skill-building information.

Prevention in Action— Stakeholders Training: Visit www.marinenet.usmc.mil and

search Prevention in Action. This self-guided online training is designed for service members and civilians who engage in prevention activities. In this course, participants learn more about how and why to champion prevention activities.