

Price Tag on Musculoskeletal Injuries More Than \$600M

The Department of Defense (DoD) spends \$600 million to \$750 million each year to treat musculoskeletal injuries. That's the word from Diana Settles, program manager for injury prevention and physical fitness for the Navy Environmental Health Center.

While this statistic covers all musculoskeletal injuries, a significant number are from sports, noted Settles. "The primary internal risk factor for these injuries is the lack of physical fitness of individuals," she said. "They begin participating in activities or organized sporting events without having a foundation of physical fitness, which predisposes them to injury."

Settles said DoD has been trying to get a better handle on the scope of the problem, but that it's been hard to do because many sports injuries occur during off-duty hours. "Many service members are 'weekend PT warriors,'" she said. "That places stress on the body, which sometimes responds in a negative way."

"Service members are damaging their ligaments, tendons, muscles, and bones," she added. "We're seeing a lot of injuries to knees and ankles. The most common injuries are sprains, which are partial or complete tears of the ligament; strains, which are partial tears of tendons or muscles (also known as muscle pulls); and fractures, dislocations and bruises."

Settles went on to say that service members can help prevent injuries by not doing so much so soon. "You really want to begin aerobically," she said. "If you haven't done anything, you want to move into conditioning gradually. You don't want to place too much stress on the body at first. Get a good pair of walking shoes or running shoes. Start, and then gradually increase your time and pace. The U.S. surgeon general recommends every American should exercise



If you haven't been doing sit-ups like this regularly, start slowly and gradually increase.

at least 30 minutes of accumulated moderate activity (such as walking, housework, gardening, etc.) per day, five days a week.

"If you've done no running, start with walking and move to running. The same kind of moderation is true with sit-ups or push-ups; if you haven't been doing them, start slowly and work your way up."

Service members, who have questions about what type of conditioning program to use, have many avenues to explore on local installations. "The Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) staff have really concentrated on improving their trained staff," Settles said. "Many MWR instructors are certified, and they can provide safe and effective guidelines for service members," she concluded. ■

Compiled from American Forces Information Service news articles by Jim Garamone.—Ed.

Resources:

- http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2001/n03272001_200103271.html[*Reducing Sports Injuries*]
- <http://www.navy.com/about/navylife/offduty/fitness/>[*Off Duty Fitness, Sports & Recreation*].