

Physical Condition and the Police Officer

The following article was written by Senior Constable R.G. ("Jock") Alcock, physical training instructor, Australian Federal Police College, Canberra.

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Jock is currently studying towards a Physical Education major in a Bachelor of Education Degree and is responsible for all recruit and in-service physical training at the A.F.P. College.

"The nature of law enforcement requires a high state of mental alertness yet basically is a sedentary occupation."

A contrasting but true quote by Thomas R. Collingwood Ph. D, of the Kentucky Department of Justice while summing up an extensive research program on physical fitness and the serving police officer of today.

I need not enter into lengthy discussion on the argument as to whether today's serving police officers are physically fit or unfit; you can best judge that issue. That is, of course, provided you can appreciate all the relevant factors of fitness pertaining to the physical efficiency and function of the serving police officer.

It is not my intention to preach physical fitness or condemn those deficient in this area. More important, I feel, is that an educational insight into development programs and training considerations be made available to those who choose to consider the efficiency factor in life... fitness.

In order to understand fully the benefits of a sound, physically fit or conditioned body (and the procurement of such an animal) we must look generally at history, motivation, arguments for increasing physical activity, arguments against increasing physical activity, health benefits, training programs, the medical and physiological aspects of fitness and, of course, the overall benefit to the police force you serve.

History

The problem of the escalating trend toward the sedentary lifestyle is very real. To understand this problem we must start by examining the history and evolution of the life style of man.

Before civilisation, man was totally dependant on physical activity in order to hunt and sustain life. Though game was plentiful, we have it on good authority that it was



rather large and quite capable of speed. So man, without weapons, had to contend physically with creatures in order to survive.

Technology emerged and along with it stone weapons, agriculture and the cancellation of the nomadic life style as settlements were set up providing labour specialisation which effectively reduced the amount of required strenuous labour.

Since that era, man has continuously (and frantically) been inventing and designing machines and methods to take him further away from manual labour. The outcome has been that man is now content and in fact still strives to reduce physical effort through the use of his ever-improving mind.

It would be safe to say that, should the trend continue, or be allowed to continue, technology will in time render man's body obsolete. What is needed now (generally) is a complete reversal of a basic historic trend. Exercise programs must be designed to put back into our lifestyles that which since the beginning of civilisation we have been trying to take out.

Physical exertion was something to trade for survival at one stage, a necessary evil to be avoided, and which technology sought to eliminate. This progression, applauded by most, has effectively reduced the physical activity of man to such an extent that the problem is now an epidemic-sized one never known before by man... degeneration due

to atrophy. Recognition of the problem is now apparent but most people continue to ignore the resolve. Instead of getting exercise as a matter of course we must now deliberately seek it out. But for most of us the benefits of physical activity are too intangible to merit our participation.

Motivation

Knowledge alone is not enough to motivate people to train physically, but it can provide a grounding and serve to whet the appetite of the undecided. This issue of Platypus will not leap from the desk (or your hands) and physically beat you into an exercise program, but I hope that at least this article will provide some desire for you to embark on some form of physical conditioning program.

In order to present an unbiased address on physical motivation I will put forward arguments for and against increasing physical activity and let your conclusion from these arguments be your guide.

The problem of increasing physical motivation is really an issue of personal behavioural changes. When considered, there arises immediately the struggle of FOR v AGAINST.

Let us then consider both aspects together. The foremost force or motivator is that of the individual's health. As the individual ages and starts to lose shape, fear cardiac problems, contract back problems and shortness of breath he realises then that something must be done and so involves himself in some form of physical program. Pride is also a prime motivating factor as almost everyone favours personal improvement and would like to project as good a picture of himself as possible. Consider also your occupation. At any given time, a gross lack of physical efficiency could well spell the end of that occupation. Finding a police officer on a disability pension to testify to this would not be difficult. Really, there

should be absolutely no need to continue providing reasons for physical efficiency . . . health, well being, social acceptance and an improved intellectual functioning should surely be reward enough to motivate.

What you must now do is conquer any fears, excuses for noncompeting or inoculations you may have previously been given against physical exertion. The fear of looking funny running, stupid riding a bike, avoiding sport because you can't hit the ball etc, must be overcome if you are at all serious about improving your fitness. You would be vague indeed to think that you are alone in your fears. It is my guess that if you tried one of the above in a strictly social atmosphere the fears would disappear, you would find a new enjoyment and would probably have the cheek to go away referring to yourself as a sportsman!

Of course there will be those who will defiantly condemn any form of exercise from the very beginning. Unfortunately these conscientious objectors are all too often very

persuasive and command a fairly large following. They would rather sip a cool drink in front of the TV than circumnavigate the block they already know is there. Why sweat, why be uncomfortable and of course why get fit anyway (or is it indeed possible?) Some people even boast obesity, "Paid for isn't it" . . . but then is it. Maybe the time for payment is yet to come and just might prove a little more costlier than anticipated.

If nothing else, be patriotic about this physical efficiency thing. Sooner or later, you the police officer, will be expected to donate a bit of that physical efficiency to a tax payer, and if that's laughable, open another tinny Norm . . . then have a look at the tax YOU payed last fortnight!

Another motivation killer is boredom experienced during the actual conditioning program. If the program you select is one of your own inventions (and why not) it is critical that the program is not impossible or allowed to become boring.

Your objective is to train, not strain. Remember also that there is more than one route to fitness and if you keep looking, sooner than you think you will find the program that suits you, and one you can enjoy. The ultimate of course is to find the program that is pleasant enough to make you want to continue. Only the practicing masochist will continue doing press ups and chin ups until a state of exhaustion is reached.

To sum up motivation, forget the excuses, show some determination and always be honest with yourself in your attempts, above all, never throw the towel in once you have decided to give it a go. Some examples of fraudulent excuses, (ingredients for failure) are: "When I walk my feet hurt". "When I run I sweat and my clothes get all messy". "The ash from my cigarette always blows back into my face when I run".

The list is endless as you can well imagine. Try to shorten it; you are your best motivator.



Protective Service Class 2/80 and their instructors pictured just before their graduation from the Australian Federal Police College, Canberra recently.