

## **FAQ From the Fleet**

Below are some questions and suggestions received at an All Hands Call from Fleet Sailors.

### **1. MENTAL HEALTH QUESTION:**

I was unable to ask my question to you yesterday and decided to take advantage of your offer to send it to you via e-mail. First, I wanted to give a little back story to help you see the relevance of me asking this question. I was dealing with anxiety issues and afraid of asking for help due to the stigma I have seen over my tenure. I finally got the help I needed due to a senior shipmate that had showed me that he was treated for something similar. This brings me to my question; is there anything that big Navy is doing to remove this stigma so more Sailors will seek the help they need? I would hope that this would also help us lose fewer shipmates to suicide as well.

### **ANSWER:**

There is a definite cultural barrier to seeking help in the Navy, and it's been identified in studies, surveys and fleet interactions such as mine with you. We have several items we are doing to change that culture. To build Sailor resiliency, we have a LifeSkills course after boot camp where we start to build the skills that Sailors will need to set them up for success. We have deployed resiliency counselors and mental health providers embarked on our large deck ships and waterfront to bring support to our Sailors at the deckplates. Embedded mental health and chaplains are also available for Sailors seeking assistance and are available to the Sailor on the deckplate. Additionally, Operational Stress Control Mobile Training Teams deliver training to commands where they help relieve stress, build coping skills, and to remind them that seeking help is the right thing. Bottom line: we want Sailors to be healthy and take advantage of the available tools.

Our ongoing suicide prevention campaign also includes spreading the word about the various forms of treatment and assistance available and how they differ to encourage more Sailors to weigh the available options rather than assume that all help seeking leads to separation and adding to the stigma. I encourage you to personally spread the word to your Shipmates that seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. You too, can make a difference. Thank you for this very important question.

### **2. PT STANDARDS SUGGESTION**

While the need for a physically fit and healthy Navy is something we can all agree on, I believe that we do Sailors a great disservice with the current PT Test Requirements.

The Swim, the 1.5 Mile, and the Bike. While they measure cardiovascular health, it shames me to admit that I've met Sailors that would drown in a deep swimming pool. The swim test, measures swim speed over time, something that is not applicable in almost all real world scenarios. The Bike, is a test that allows the stockier members of the Navy a test that doesn't involve running. I would propose changing the swim test to better develop the survival skills needed if a Sailor falls overboard.

Treading Water and the Survival Breast Stroke – Rather than a 400 or 500 yard swim timed, I would suggest requiring a fixed distance (laps) survival swim followed by a timed treading water, and being able to demonstrate a dead man’s float, would apply to traditional Sailor skills when compared to a 1.5 mile run or Bike. As to the 400 or 500 swim, I frankly see little real world value in that test. But I see real value in regards to increasing the survivability of my brothers and sisters if they fall overboard.

**ANSWER:**

The Physical Readiness Test (PRT) is intended to provide Commanding Officers (CO) with a means of assessing the general fitness of the Sailors in their command while complying with the Department of Defense Instruction 1308.3 series that directs the Services to develop and administer a physical fitness test that evaluates aerobic capacity, or cardio-respiratory endurance, and muscular strength, and muscular endurance. As you note in your question, the cardio-respiratory fitness portion of the PRT is intended to test one’s aerobic capacity, which is the ability of the heart and lungs to deliver oxygen to working muscles. It is associated with the ability to carry out strenuous work for long durations without fatigue. The standard mechanism for testing cardio-respiratory fitness is the 1.5 mile run. COs may also authorize an alternate cardio event, such as the stationary bike or the 500-yard/450-meter swim, providing the appropriate resources are available and do not pose an unnecessary burden to the command for the CFL to administer. Only two percent or less of the Navy use the swim test as an alternate test.

Your concern about Sailor safety is noted and appreciated. What you have proposed is actually a water survival skill test vice a test of cardio-respiratory fitness and would not assess a Sailor’s aerobic capacity and general fitness. Every Sailor should be proficient in the water survival skills you mentioned as every Sailor must pass a Navy Third Class Swim Test. The initial test is conducted in basic training (boot camp) for enlisted personnel, and as part of officer accession training for commissioned officers.

**3. PT STANDARDS SUGGESTION:**

I agree with what one of my fellow peers said on the First Class Mess FB page. We need to change the PT running to treading in water and swimming, lifting one's body out of the water and jumping off a 14-foot diving board, just like Boot Camp.

**ANSWER:**

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Like your shipmate, we appreciate your question and concern for the well-being and safety of Sailors. Those Navy communities who are at increased risk have incorporated recurring water survival requalification into their training requirements. As an example, Navy aircrew have to requalify every four years when in an operational environment. You bring up a good point about having to require all Sailors to have proficient advanced water survival skills. We often pilot aerobic options for Sailor operational fitness, and we will follow up on your suggestion and look at water survival skills as a future aerobic option. Thank you for your question!