



# LIFELINK

## NEWSLETTER

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### TBI: Info, Resources for Military and Caregivers

*"I had to learn how to walk and talk and eat, dress myself all over again. It was like a physical, mental, emotional, spiritual rebirth that took me two months."*

- **Gary Busey**, actor, discussing his 1988 motorcycle accident that led to a Traumatic Brain Injury

March is Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Awareness Month. TBI is defined as a structural injury to the brain or a disruption of the normal physiological functioning of the brain resulting from an external force, such as a blow, bump, or jolt to the head, an explosive blast, or a penetrating head injury. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of such an injury may range from mild (i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to severe (i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury).

According to the **Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC)**, military personnel are at increased risk for TBI compared to their civilian counterparts. More than 360,000 military members sustained TBIs, predominantly mild, between 2000 and 2016. Untangling the relationship between TBI and suicide or suicide attempts is a complex task, but research from DVBIC offers some insights into possible connections.

Research has consistently found elevated rates of death by suicide, as well as suicide attempts and suicide ideation, in individuals with a history of TBI. In non-military studies, the risk of death by suicide was shown to be up to three to four times higher for individuals with TBI than for the general population. In military populations, the elevated risk for death by suicide has been observed in some research, but not in all. A 2011 large-scale study of veterans who received care from the Veterans Health Administration found that veterans with a history of TBI were 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide compared to veterans with no history of TBI. However, a 2012 study of 1,764 U.S. service members who died by suicide did not find an association between suicide and TBI, although DVBIC reported that the difference in findings may be due to differences in each study's design.

Why would someone with TBI be at increased risk for suicidal behavior? The **Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)** offers some reasons. In an **SPRC manual on TBI and Suicide**, sustaining a TBI can create stress in many ways, including from a decreased ability to function as a parent or spouse. A TBI can

also result in loss of work or other support systems in some cases. Additionally, the physiological effects of TBI can contribute to limited problem-solving strategies due to cognitive deficits, increased impulsivity or poor judgement.

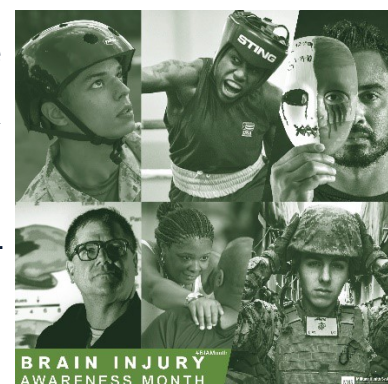
The only cure for TBI is prevention. There are many ways to minimize the risk for TBI in our everyday lives. The

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** and the **New York Health Department** recommend:

- Always wear a helmet or appropriate headgear when riding a bike, motorcycle or other recreational vehicle, when skating, skateboarding or playing other sports
- Replace any damaged sports gear. Wearing protective gear that has been damaged creates a false sense of security
- Make home safety improvements, such as guards on windows and removing items that are trip hazards
- Review your medications with a health care provider, including over the counter medications. Some may cause dizziness and lead to a fall

Recovering from TBI can be challenging. The **Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC)** says that positively managing TBI symptoms, modifying health behaviors that can make symptoms worse and identifying when additional help is needed are all important steps during the recovery process. NMCPHC has information to assist service members and those who support them, including fact sheets on preventing **repeat brain injury, depression after brain injury** and other **psychological and emotional well-being resources**.

**Editor's note:** This article was compiled from information from the **Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center**, the **Suicide Prevention Resource Network** and the **Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center**. For more information, contact the MHS through their **website** or the NMCPHC at 757-953-0700.



BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH



## Lifelink Spotlight

### SAIL Program: Engaging, Assisting Sailors During Critical Times

Did you know that suicide risk is highest in the 90 days following a suicide attempt or other suicide-related behavior (SRB)? A non-fatal attempt by a Sailor is an opportunity to help him or her live. Addressing these behaviors can prevent a future attempt or death by suicide. The **Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) Program** provides intervention and assistance to identified Sailors during this critical time. All Suicide Prevention Coordinators are required to take the mandatory **self-paced SAIL training**.

SAIL is an evidence-based approach to intervention that provides rapid assistance, ongoing risk assessment, care coordination and reintegration assistance for service members identified with an SRB. Risk is assessed at key intervals using the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale and managed using the VA Safety Plan through a series of contacts over 90 days following an SRB. Participation in SAIL is voluntary.

SAIL is not designed to replace existing suicide prevention efforts nor replace needed mental health services. The SAIL Program isn't treatment; it's a support network that assists Sailors in navigating resources. SAIL Case Managers are Fleet and Family Support Center counselors who initiate and provide a series of caring contacts after an SRB. These case managers can help with everything from assisting with care coordination to connecting Sailors with financial counselors or other resources as needed.

Navy Suicide Prevention Branch (OPNAV N171), together with Commander, Navy Installations Command and the Bureau of Navy Medicine and Surgery, launched the first phase of the SAIL Program in the Pacific Northwest Region in August 2016. SAIL was launched Navy-wide in 2017.

Important policy guidance and training for SAIL is available on the OPNAVY N171 [website](#), including [leadership messaging](#), a [downloadable brochure](#), [rack card](#) or [poster](#) and the [SAIL Commander's Toolkit](#). The toolkit is a quick reference for commanders and other leaders that describes the program, the process and the commander's role in SAIL and suicide prevention.



## Plan of the Week Notes

*Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of March:*

1. March is National Brain Injury Awareness Month. A traumatic brain injury (TBI) occurs when an external force is applied to the brain and is significant enough to change the way the brain functions. Wounded, ill, or injured (WII) service members who have sustained an injury including a mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI or concussion) and who continue to experience chronic, persistent symptoms can face challenges that affect daily living. Learn how to recognize the signs of TBI and where to turn for help at <https://go.usa.gov/xd5nD>.
2. Staying fit requires more than physical strength – it requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on the mind, body and spirit working together. Whether you are preparing to deploy, are currently deployed or are reintegrating, it's important to consider how mind and body practices like breathing, meditation and relaxation techniques can assist you in staying resilient or coping with invisible wounds. Learn more about breathing and meditation techniques to manage stress on the NavyNavStress blog at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/category/sleep/>.
3. If you plan to drink on St. Patrick's Day, don't count on luck. Have a plan and drink responsibly. Own Your Limits, is an educational campaign for the military. Their website provides resources and information to Service members so they can serve honorably and drink responsibly. Resources are also available for professionals who educate, support or work with Service members. Learn more at <https://www.ownyourlimits.org/>.
4. March is National Nutrition Month and it is a great time to focus on the importance of making informed food choices, developing sound eating habits and getting in enough physical activity. Nutrition plays a role in mission readiness. Learn more from the Real Warriors Campaign at <https://www.realwarriors.net/stress-anxiety/nutrition>.
5. Summer PCS season will be here soon. Plan for a stress-free move using the Department of Defense's official customer moving portal. Move.mil has resources on planning, scheduling and getting ready for moving day, as well as tips and tutorials to help at <https://move.mil/>.

## News and Resources

5 Tips to Manage Separation for Military Families  
[Health.mil](#)

A Strategic Planning Approach to Suicide Prevention  
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Psychological Health by the Numbers  
[Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#)

Athletic Trainers Are Enablers of Marine Corps Readiness  
[Health.mil](#)

Suicide Risk After Emergency Department Visits  
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Action Alliance Forms Service Members, Veterans and Their Families Advisory Group  
[National Action Alliance](#)

How Veterans Can Navigate Change Through Writing  
[Real Warriors](#)

Sleep, Exercise and Weight Management  
[Human Performance Resources by Champ](#)

Resources for Suicide Loss Survivors  
[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

Visual Signals: Military Communication Without Words  
[Human Performance Resources by Champ](#)

Fuel Your Body During National Nutrition Month  
[Health.mil](#)

## Current and Upcoming Events

### SPC Training Webinars

March 12, 8AM CDT  
March 26, 10AM CDT  
[Register here](#)

### Brain Injury Awareness Month

### National Nutrition Month

## Eat Right, Bite by Bite, for National Nutrition Month

*Editor's Note: The following article was written by: LCDR Melissa Amescua, MS, LD, RD, MSC, USN; OPNAV N17, 21st Century Sailor Office. For questions or more information on speaking to a dietitian in the Navy, contact her at [melissa.amescua@navy.mil](mailto:melissa.amescua@navy.mil).*

March is **National Nutrition Month**. This year's theme, which is annually picked by the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**, is "Eat Right, Bite by Bite." In addition to a theme, the Academy has put together four weeks of ways to take small steps focusing on the behavior change of eating right.



- Week One: Eat a variety of nutritious foods every day
- Week Two: Plan your meals each week
- Week Three: Learn skills to create tasty meals
- Week Four: Seek out assistance from a dietitian or a health professional

**In week one, start by just looking at your plate.** If most of your plate is grain, such as pasta or bread, or maybe all protein, such as mostly beef or chicken, then start by making at least half of your plate fruits and vegetables. Remember that portion size is important, so consider using smaller rather than larger plates. Break out measuring cups and spoons to be truly accurate with amounts. In addition, remember to drink lots of water throughout the day. Get a bottle, fill it up several times per day and add fresh fruit or vegetables for flavor.

**In week two, start meal planning.** Having a plan will make you more successful. Use a new app or grocery list to make sure you know what to buy and plan the days to shop.

**In week three, be creative.** Eating healthy can taste great! We have so many options and recipes at our fingertips. Find recipes that have nutrition facts and ones that limit the ingredients to only what you know and can read. Try new flavors. Remember that our taste buds change. Things that we once didn't care for, we may now enjoy.

**In week four, get more assistance.** Last, if you are not seeing progress or need further assistance, reach out to a dietitian or health professional that can help you reach your health goals. Registered dietitians are available to units throughout the fleet—learn more in [this article](#) on Navy.mil.

Eating healthy helps prevent some of the leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes. It also can assist in the prevention of things like depression, different types of mental health disorders and even inflammatory disease. [This article](#) from the NavyNavStress blog also has information on fueling your mind and body with foods that impact the way we feel.

Recent research indicates that changing your eating to more **Mediterranean-based diets** can increase your health tremendously. This diet has a specific focus on fatty fish that are high in omega-3's, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds. It is a diet rich in healthy fats such as olives, olive oil and avocados.

Making changes can make a world of difference for your health. The key is to mindfully pick healthier foods so we improve our health "bite by bite."