



# MINDLINES

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## *Building Resilience through Adaptive Athletics*

*By Capt. Scott L. Johnston,  
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Director, NCCOSC*

**W**hat does resilience have to do with wheelchair basketball? A lot actually, because one way you can build, strengthen and maintain your resilience is through physical activity, especially a team activity.

Lately, there's been a lot of talk about resilience and why it's important. Being able to adapt and overcome daily challenges, tragedies, and difficult situations is a useful skill for everyone, particularly Sailors and Marines. It promotes readiness on both an individual and organizational level.

But, aside from just talking about what it is and why it matters, we also need to talk about what you can do to actually become more resilient, especially if you are a service member who has become ill or injured. The challenges that Sailors and Marines face during recovery and rehabilitation can be incredibly stressful, personally and professionally. Resilience can better prepare you to handle that stress and even come through it stronger than before.

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a Navy Safe Harbor adaptive athletics camp and the 2014 Marine Corps Trials where I met Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and other service members all participating in adaptive athletics programs. Not only were these service members building their resilience, they were thriving.

Adaptive athletics are sports activities modified to meet the abilities of injured or ill service members. Almost any sport you can think of can be adapted including basketball, track and field, archery, swimming, and volleyball. Adaptive athletics, as well as other team sports, can help individuals build resilience because being active in sports



*Capt. Scott Johnston, NCCOSC director, receives training on chair usage for wheelchair basketball from Coach Grant Moorhead at the Admiral James G. Prout III Field House on Naval Base San Diego March 5, 2014. Photography by Joe Griffin.*

helps maintain and improve physical health and develop social connections – both factors associated with resilience.

Physical activity promotes resilience for several reasons. Aside from giving off those “feel good” chemicals, endor-

*continued on page 8*

# RESILIENCE

## *and Finding the New Normal*

(excerpts from a recent interview)

**W**e recently had the opportunity to speak to two Marines participating in the Marine Corps Trials held at Camp Pendleton in March. These two Wounded Warrior athletes shared their insight into how adaptive athletics helped them with their recovery, made them more resilient, and helped them find their “new normal.”

Cpl. Gabriel H. Beltres, Wounded Warrior Battalion West, Hawaii Detachment

**Q:** *What have you learned about resilience from adaptive sports?*

**A:** Don't let your limits limit you. There's something out there that you can do. There's something that you haven't thought of. There's something you haven't given your all and if you haven't tried it and you haven't put your full effort into it, there's no rea-

son for you to quit. There's no reason for you to make excuses. All there is, is to get out there and get something done.

**Q:** *What would you say to Marines struggling to overcome difficulties in their life?*

**A:** Don't try to take it all on yourself. We joined the military and we're not out fighting by ourselves, so why should you fight this problem by yourself? Your fellow brothers and sisters are the ones that can help you with your situation the best. They've been through the same situations, so talk to them, work out your problems through them first and maybe they can give you advice on stuff that helped them out, the paths that they have crossed. Get help from your peers.

**Q:** *Coming to these games after being injured, does it give you that feeling of teamwork?*

**A:** In the Marine Corps, from boot camp until you get out, you're always competing. Trying to get a better PFT score, trying to get a better CFT score, running faster than your friend. You know, trying to one up the person next to you just so you have bragging rights. This is the same deal. The same people are here and we're cool outside the competition, but when we're in competition, it's the whole thing – we're focused, we're having fun. It's something that brings back the sense of competition, camaraderie, and just friendship.



*Cpl. Gabriel Beltres winds up in preparation for throwing the discus at the 2014 Marine Corps Trials field event held at Marine Corps Base (MCB) Camp Pendleton, March 11, 2014. Photography by Joe Griffin.*



Cpl. Marcus Chischilly, Wounded Warrior Battalion West, Naval Medical Center San Diego

**Q:** *How has participating in adaptive sports aided your recovery and developing resilience?*

**A:** Resilience is the key. The ability to pick yourself up and continue moving forward. Adaptive sports is so key to that. You could put a prosthetic on, you can walk around and try to live a normal life, but when you compete, you push your body, post-injury, to that limit to try to be really competitive with adaptive sports, with a prosthetic, with a chair designed for a basketball, and you know you get into the pool and race against other disabled military vets. That's kind of what brings you back to life. I mean, you have this community, you see other people who are doing well with their fitness, you see other people come out with a strong-minded mentality and you get into that community and that's when it just takes you forward.

**Q:** *How has being around other people with similar injuries, being part of this community, impacted your recovery personally?*

**A:** Personally, it's been good. You know, when I woke up in the hospital, I checked myself over, and I was like, 'Oh man, I'm missing my leg, that really sucks.' It bummed me out a lot. It got to me immediately. I began to think in my head, how am I going to live my life, what things am I going to be able to do? Am I going to be able to play with my kids? Am I going to be able to just be a normal person? And there were Marines who were walking around the hospital who had been injured three or four months prior, and who had just gotten on prosthetics and they wanted to make sure they reached out to others who were going through the same process. They came in and they were just like, you know what? Don't worry about this, this will pass too and eventually you're going to get back on your feet, you're going to get running again, you're going to get into different things, you're going to be able to travel the world, and do things you thought weren't possible because of your injury. So it was really great to see them. They gave us a lot of inspiration and a lot of motivation.

**Q:** *What words of wisdom would you have*

*for a newly injured Marine to start them on their journey to recovery?*

**A:** Just stay positive. Learn anything and everything you can about your disability. If someone is doing something that you think might not be possible, give it a try. You never know what possibilities are out there for you. I've seen a lot of people never like a sport, they try it once, they train, and they just do really well. They flourish in the sport. They're super competitive and they do a lot of really good things. Just stay positive. It's about your family, your friends, everybody who gives you help. Embrace that, try not to push anybody away.

**Q:** *Would you encourage other Wounded Warriors to do adaptive sports and participate in the Warrior Games?*

**A:** Absolutely. Adaptive sports is key. It promotes good health, you stay in shape, you get to travel, you get to do different events, they have the Paralympic committee. You definitely have to stay engaged when you become disabled. 🇺🇸

*For the complete interview, visit us on the web at [www.nccosc.navy.mil](http://www.nccosc.navy.mil) or our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/nccosc](http://www.youtube.com/user/nccosc).*

*Cpl. Marcus Chischilly competes in the 100 meter dash for single above the knee amputees at the 2014 Marine Corps Trials, MCB Camp Pendleton, March 11, 2014. Photography by Joe Griffin.*



# Finding a Safe Harbor

In nautical terms, a safe harbor is a place where ships can weather a storm. A place of refuge and safety where Sailors can wait for clear skies and calm seas. But in today's Navy, the term has a new meaning. The Navy's Wounded Warrior-Safe Harbor program is a place where wounded, ill and injured Sailors, Coast Guardsmen and their families can find non-medical care and assistance that will support them during their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration. For many service members, this

program is literally their safe harbor as they learn to manage their physical or psychological injury or illness.

While there are many ways that the Navy's Safe Harbor program can help Sailors and Coast Guardsmen, one of the programs that has a big impact is the adaptive athletic conditioning program. This program offers athletic activities modified to fit the abilities of injured or ill participants, such as wheelchair basketball and seated volleyball, and helps them build strength and endurance, making fitness an integral part of their recovery. It also provides an opportunity for them to connect with others and build their social network by becoming part of a team again. People who exercise regularly and have a strong social support system are more resilient and better able to manage stress.

"The military provides a very strong sense of community and belonging," says Ismael "Marty" Martinez, the director of adaptive athletics for the Navy's Wounded Warrior-Safe Harbor program. "Adaptive athletics are important to service members because it lets them know they are part of a team again, that they belong to something again."

According to Martinez, the service members and care-

**Above left:** Capt. Scott Johnston, NCCOSC director, discusses the Navy's Safe Harbor adaptive athletics program with Ismael "Marty" Martinez, the program's director at the Admiral James G. Prout III Field House, Naval Base San Diego, during a visit to the Navy Safe Harbor adaptive athletic camp March 5, 2014. **Left:** NCCOSC leadership joins the team huddle at the Navy Safe Harbor wheelchair basketball camp before the game begins. **Below:** Capt. Scott Johnston and Cmdr. Jean Fisak, NCCOSC director and deputy director, practice their wheelchair basketball skills. **Opposite:** Adaptive athletes enjoying a game of wheelchair basketball. Photography by Joe Griffin.







To learn more about the Navy's Safe Harbor, visit [safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil](http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil) or call 877-746-8563.

givers who get involved with the program have a great opportunity to build friendships because they meet others going through similar experiences, giving them an instant connection. It shows them “they aren’t alone and that there are other people like me,” says Martinez. Once the camps are over, many of them stay in touch through Facebook or email and exchange ideas until they can reunite at the next activity.

Throughout the year, Safe Harbor offers a series of adaptive athletic conditioning camps at naval bases across the U.S., providing opportunities for wounded warriors to maintain their fitness and their connections to other service members.

“Some of our athletes have been in the Navy for quite some time and they want to be part of a team, but don’t know how to do it,” says Martinez. “When they go back home to the middle of America, there is no more Navy there, no team, so when we bring them to these camps, they get revitalized.”

One of the most important aspects of the program, according to Martinez, is that it shows the wounded warriors something

they don’t always realize – that they are still able to do so many things, including sports, and this gives them hope, something that is associated with resilience.

By getting involved and discovering all the things they can still do, service members involved with Safe Harbor can find their “new normal,” a term that refers to accepting physical and psy-

## **This program offers athletic activities modified to fit the abilities of injured or ill participants, such as wheelchair basketball and seated volleyball**

chological changes that occur after a life-altering illness or injury and finding new ways to thrive and embrace life.

Beyond the support and resources to aid them as they recover, rehabilitate and reintegrate that service members get when they enroll in Navy Safe Harbor, they are also given the opportunity to develop something less tangible, but every bit as important – their resilience. 🧠





# The Psychological Benefits of Adaptive Athletics

By Kartavya Vyas,  
Clinical Research Coordinator

Since 2001, over 35,000 service members have been injured in the OIF/OEF conflicts, with a 90 percent survival rate. Many of the injured have amputations as a result of the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as well as other physical and psychological injuries. The resulting trauma and loss of physical ability not only negatively impacts the emotional and psychosocial well-being of the injured service member, it also makes reintegration and rehabilitation more difficult.

That's where adaptive athletics comes in. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, individuals with physical disabilities who remain physically active exhibit better emotional and physical health as well as improved overall health. One of the reasons that adaptive athletics benefits service members is that it shows them they can succeed even with a disability or injury, which improves their self-perception and confidence through competence in sports. Adaptive sports and recreation also helps service members rebuild their identity, extend their limits, learn adaptive strategies, and gain new purpose in life.

Over the past several years, research has indicated that there are plenty of other psychological and physical benefits to adaptive sports as well.

### **Psychological benefits include:**

- Lower levels of depression, anxiety, and sleeplessness
- Improved self-perception
- Improved mood
- Improved body image
- Reduction in anger, confusion, and fatigue
- Improved life satisfaction

### **Physical benefits include:**

- Lower levels of pain and tension
- Fewer/less severe secondary health problems
- Enhanced ability to complete daily activities and perform self-care
- Increased wheelchair mobility skills
- Greater physical independence

It's easy to see how the physical gains of adaptive athletics contribute to the psychological benefits. Less pain, better health, increased independence, and more confidence all have a positive impact on mental health and emotional well-being. With so many advantages, when it comes to adaptive sports, there are no losers, only winners. 🏆



# Happy Birthday!

*During the summer months*, Navy Medicine celebrates three very important birthdays – that of the Hospital Corps, Medical Service Corps and the Dental Corps.

**June 17, 1898** - On this date 116 years ago, the U.S. Navy Hospital Corps, the largest and most decorated rating in the Navy, is born. Known as “Doc” by their Marine brothers and sisters, Hospital Corpsmen have been serving proudly on sea and shore. Within the Hospital Corps are Behavioral Health Technicians, specialists who work with mental health providers to help Marines and Sailors recover from mental health illnesses and injuries and promote resilience. At NC-COSC, we have several staff who are former Hospital Corpsmen, still dedicated to the mission of improving the lives of Sailors and Marines.

**August 4, 1947** - This date is the birthday of the Medical Service Corps (MSC). Established by President Truman, this particular corps of multidisciplinary specialists includes Navy psychologists who work to support medical and mission readiness by providing care and treatment to Sailors and Marines with psychological illnesses and injuries. This relatively new field has proven to be vital to the Navy Medicine mission as the number of psychologically ill and injured service members has grown after over a decade of combat. At NCCOSC, our director, Capt. Scott Johnston, is a Navy psychologist and MSC officer who has served in the Navy since the MSC's 47th birthday.

**August 22, 1912** - President Howard Taft signed into law the congressional act establishing the Navy Dental Corps. For 102 years, Navy dentists have maintained dental health and readiness for Sailors and Marines around the world. Rear Adm. Elaine Wagner, deputy chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery's Wounded, Ill and Injured that has oversight of NCCOSC, is also a Navy dentist and the former Chief, Navy Dental Corps.

## Get Active with MWR and MCCS

### **Navy Liberty Centers**

Liberty Centers are tobacco- and alcohol-free facilities for enlisted active duty personnel, located on Navy installations throughout the globe that provide free or low cost recreational activities and trips. For more information, visit [www.navymwr.org](http://www.navymwr.org).

### **Single Marine Program**

The MCCS Single Marine Program supports quality of life activities for Marines, Sailors and Coast Guardsmen who are single or geographical bachelors by providing free or low cost recreational activities, trips, and volunteer opportunities. For more information, visit [www.usmc-mccs.org/smp/index](http://www.usmc-mccs.org/smp/index).

### **MWR and MCCS Fitness and Leisure**

MWR and MCCS offer many different sports activities from 5K fun runs to tournament and leagues. Lessons are available for different activities including tennis, surfing and sailing. If you need to relax and relieve a little stress, massages are also available at many locations. For more information, visit your local Navy or Marine Corps installation's fitness center.

### **Navy Fleet and Family Support Programs**

FFSP activities provide numerous resources and classes to support individual and family readiness. They offer LifeSkills courses, including anger and stress management, and provide clinical counseling services. To find your local Fleet and Family Service Center, visit [www.cniv.navy.mil/ffr/family\\_readiness/fleet\\_and\\_family\\_support\\_program/regional\\_office\\_program\\_directory](http://www.cniv.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program/regional_office_program_directory).



## DEFINING RESILIENCE

**D**o you know what it means to be resilient? According to a wealth of research undertaken by mental health professionals in recent years, resilient people are those who have the ability to withstand, recover, function, and even grow when faced with challenges, adversity, or tragedy. Resilience isn't just about handling the big stressors that may come your way, like a lengthy deployment, it can also help you deal with your daily stress, like getting stuck in traffic and being late to work.

The good news about resilience is that it's not something that you either have or you don't. Psychological health researchers have found that resilience is a skill that can be learned and strengthened once you have it. That means you can also be less resilient depending on the level of stress you face and whether or not you work at maintaining your resilience. Think of it as a muscle. When you work out with weights, you can build your muscles and make them bigger and stronger. When you don't work out, you might end up with muscles that are little on the puny side. So, what can you do to be more resilient? Here are a few ideas:

**Build your social networks.** Having friends and family is good for your mental health. Resilient people tend to have more friends they can lean on for support when times get rough. How can you build your social networks? Your local Navy Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs and Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) offer plenty of events and programs that can help you meet like-minded people.

If you're a single Marine or Sailor, get involved with the Liberty and Single Marine Programs on base. You can meet plenty of people and have fun while doing it.

If you're into sports, MWR and MCCS offer sports leagues for all ranks through local fitness centers that afford opportunities to meet new people.

Don't forget that Navy Fleet and Family Support Center and the MCCS Marine Corps Family Team Building offer plenty of classes and activities where you can meet other military families and make connections.

**Learn to keep your cool.** Research into psychological health and well-being has shown that focusing on behavior control (learning to regulate your thought, feelings and behaviors) has a positive impact on how you react to stressful situations, which also builds your resilience.

One way to improve your behavior control is to learn relaxation techniques that can help you keep your cool in stressful situations. When you remain calm under stress, your ability to think clearly before reacting and maintain your mental focus improves. Relaxation techniques can include meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, deep breathing, and Tai Chi.

MWR, MCCS and most military treatment facilities offer a variety of wellness programs that include relaxation techniques. Other great resources for picking up tips and tools to incorporate relaxation techniques into your life include Military OneSource and the Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center. 📱

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for updates about how to build your resilience.



# Food for Thought: Pump Some Iron


Your brain is the control center for your emotions and behavior. It's also one of your body's most important organs. To function well, your brain depends on the overall physical health of your body, which includes good nutrition. Here's some food for thought:

A 2009 study evaluated the impact of iron supplementation on 219 female U. S. Army recruits during eight weeks of basic training. The study found that increased physical activity diminished iron stores, adversely affecting both cognitive and physical performance. They also concluded

that providing iron supplements to female recruits improved their cognitive abilities and physical performance.

The female recruits who took iron supplements had faster run times over the course of basic training and also scored substantially higher on a psychological assessment, the Profiles of Mood States (POMS), an indicator of cognitive status.

Military service is a physically and mentally demanding occupation, which is why good nutrition is so important. By making sure you are getting the right amount of nutrients, you don't just improve your

physical performance, you also boost your thinking abilities. Now, that's food for thought! 

*To learn more about dietary supplementation and good nutrition, visit the Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center at [www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcp/hcl/health-promotion/healthy-eating](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcp/hcl/health-promotion/healthy-eating).*

*(McClung, J., Karl, J., & Cable, S. (2009). Randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial of iron supplementation in female soldiers during military training: effects on iron status, physical performance, and mood. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 90, 124-131)*

## Building Resilience


*continued from page 1*

phins, which provide a sense of well-being and a more positive attitude, exercise increases your strength and endurance while improving your overall health. This means that your brain and the systems that support it are healthier too and that can result in better mental focus and cognitive functioning. Add in that exercise helps you manage your weight and achieve fitness goals, you get a boost of confidence as well. In a nutshell, your physical health and psychological well-being are deeply intertwined.

After a major illness or injury, service members often feel as though they've lost so much. In addition to losing their health or perhaps a limb, ill and injured service members who are transferred to a new location to facilitate recovery may also lose the camaraderie they had with their unit. This sense of belonging is not just an important part of military service leading to unit cohesion, it also often becomes part of their identity. Losing that connection can often seem like losing another part of yourself. Adaptive athletics changes that by giving something back – the opportunity to be part of a team again. A large part

of being resilient is developing a strong social network. Having people that you can laugh with, unburden yourself to, and rely on in times of need is essential to being resilient. Too often, service members, particularly those with non-visible illnesses and injuries, isolate themselves. The opportunity to have that sense of belonging and camaraderie again encourages them to get out and get back into civilization and regain that sense of unit cohesion.

Wheelchair basketball, or other adaptive sports, can provide a great opportunity to combine physical fitness with the social aspect that is inherent in team sports. It's a chance to be with other wounded warriors, who know better than most what you're going through. Adaptive athletics can really be a stepping stone to a much healthier and productive life.

Resilience is really a set of skills that you can learn and strengthen; one way to do that is through adaptive athletics. When you work on improving your physical and social health, when look for new ways to challenge yourself and set new goals, you're also building your resilience. Being resilient doesn't mean you won't have bad days or that you don't get stressed, but it can make it easier to navigate the road to recovery, work through the challenges, and have fun while you're doing it. 

**On the Cover:** Lance Cpl. Jacob V. Kaufman prepares to sight in an M777A2 155 mm light-weight howitzer for direct fire at the Rodriguez Live-Fire Complex. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Kasey Peacock.

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