



Stronger Every Day: Behaviors That Build a Warrior

Warfighters train more than just their bodies. They strengthen their minds and spirits.

Developing the Mind, Body, and Spirit means treating oneself as a high-performing asset primed for peak performance. The key to maintaining a high-performance edge lies in the daily behaviors that keep Sailors fueled, focused, and ready for any challenge. This article discusses the behaviors that promote readiness and maximize performance.

Pillars of Success

Warrior Toughness skills strengthen the Mind, Body, and Spirit of every Sailor so they can excel in combat and succeed in life. This holistic approach equips Sailors with tools across the four pillars of Warrior Toughness.

Toughness helps Sailors stick to their values, make smart choices, and keep going when things get hard.

Resilience enables Sailors to recover quickly from setbacks and maintain focus during tough situations.

Optimizing performance focuses on training that builds the skills to succeed under stress, not just rise to the occasion.

Mitigating stress involves recognizing and managing stress before it impacts performance or decision-making.

Through Warrior Toughness, Sailors develop a Warrior Mindset grounded in knowing what they are committed to, preparing for the event or mission, executing at peak performance, reflecting on what went right, and finding areas of opportunity. The Warrior Mindset can only be effective if each domain includes the building and maintenance of the Mind, Body, and Spirit through healthy behaviors.

Healthy Behaviors

Healthy behaviors are the actions a Sailor takes consistently, big or small, that strengthen their Mind, Body, and Spirit. By developing and sustaining healthy habits, Sailors improve how they think, move, recover, and lead both on and off-duty. These behaviors build a foundation for long-term success and well-being, especially in demanding environments. Long-term readiness depends on effective daily habits.



A Sailor on a ship with three shadows; reading, saluting, and running



The healthy actions individuals take promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. While these are often simple everyday habits, over time they create long-lasting, positive effects on one's health.

LCDR Daniel Chase Williams

Maximize the Mind

Sailors require a clear and intentional approach to solving problems and responding to unexpected or challenging situations. To perform effectively under stress, they must strengthen their minds by developing social, psychological, and life skills. These skills support healthy relationships, stress management, early recognition of warning signs, and the willingness to ask for help. Ultimately, they provide the tools needed to navigate daily life in a healthy, purposeful way.

Habits such as regular reading, engaging with thought-provoking media, practicing mindfulness, and consistent journaling contribute to mental growth.



Individuals exercising

Mentally strong Sailors also embrace continuous learning, recognizing that training and education go beyond technical skills. Whether through classroom instruction, hands-on experience, or collaborative learning teams, these opportunities build character, sharpen mission focus, and prepare Sailors to lead with strength, clarity, and resilience under pressure.

Build the Body

Most people think of physical fitness when defining strength, but building a healthy warfighter means more than lifting weights or going for a run. Physical strength includes all aspects related to the tangible, physical well-being and function of a person, namely exercise, nutrition, and sleep. These

needs affect energy, mood, recovery, system immunity, and decision-making abilities. By staying active, fueling properly, and getting restorative sleep, Sailors maintain healthy bodies ready for life and mission demands.

Reps and Sets

Sailors should make physical fitness a consistent part of their daily routine. Taking ownership of their fitness allows them to address weaknesses and build the strength and endurance needed for mission-specific demands. Year-round training, not just during Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA) cycles, ensures sustained readiness and long-term performance.

Deliberate training with structured sets, realistic scenarios, and balanced

routines that include preparation, activity, and recovery reduces injury risk and builds operational capability.

Tools like the Navy Operational Fitness and Fueling System (NOFFS) offer safe, effective programs such as endurance, sandbag, and aquatics training to support peak performance.

Common barriers like self-doubt, impatience, unrealistic goals, and inconsistent schedules can disrupt progress. Sailors can overcome these by setting Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely (SMART) goals; staying consistent; and leaning on support systems.

Exercising with a partner adds accountability, while balancing effort with recovery keeps them healthy, mission-ready, and resilient for the challenges ahead.



We face unique challenges that require us to be very intentional to maintain healthy behaviors.

CAPT Jonathon Puskas



Individuals eating healthy foods and fueling bodies

Fit and Fueled

Balanced nutrition fuels the Body with carbohydrates for energy, protein for muscle repair, and healthy fats for overall protection. Viewing food as nourishment rather than just calories encourages sustainable behaviors like mindful eating, reading food labels, and making informed choices, especially when dining out.

Optimal nutrition supports energy, recovery, and long-term health through five key habits. Sailors committed to building a strong, healthy Body eat clean by choosing

natural foods and lean proteins; eat often with small, regular meals; stay hydrated with plenty of water; recover through sleep and post-workout nutrition; and maintain a balanced mindset focused on consistency over perfection.

Avoiding diet pills, extreme diets, and harmful comparisons, especially on social media, protects both physical and mental well-being. By choosing realistic goals and sustainable nutrition habits, supported by resources like NOFFS, Sailors build long-term strength, resilience, and overall health.

Rested and Ready

Sleep is essential for survival and optimal functioning. It supports every aspect of physical and mental health by allowing the Body to recover from stress and the brain to maintain alertness, judgment, decision-making, situational awareness, and memory. High-quality, restorative sleep enhances health and performance, while poor or insufficient sleep increases the risk of serious health issues.



Healthy nutrition includes eating a variety of foods and maintaining a balanced diet, fueling properly with nutrient-dense foods, and being consistent with habits.

LCDR Daniel Chase Williams

Sailors often experience disrupted sleep due to non-circadian rhythm watches, personnel or operational calls, and others coming and going from sleeping spaces. Despite these challenges, they can improve their quality of sleep by following a consistent schedule and creating a calming bedtime routine. Calming practices like reading or stretching, aiming for 8 hours of rest, and using tools such as earplugs or eye masks can further promote better sleep.

Disruptive habits, such as excessive screen time; consuming caffeine, nicotine, or alcohol before bed; lying down when not sleepy; or using sleep aids without medical advice, undermine rest and recovery. Stress or strenuous activity before bed can also interfere with the body's ability to wind down. Prioritizing healthy sleep habits supports a Sailor's long-term well-being and readiness.

Strengthen the Spirit

The Spirit reflects an individual's ability to connect with something greater and sustain a sense of purpose. It involves loyalty and affection toward a cause, belief, or person beyond oneself, which drives individuals to become the best version of themselves.

Sailors strengthen their Spirit by understanding their personal values, connecting them to organizational values, and knowing their why. They nurture this connection through actions such as volunteering, attending worship services, refining their Warrior Ethos, especially after life milestones. According to LCDR Williams, "One of the most important things is taking leave and reconnecting with the people that you care about, going to various places and experiencing the culture, or simply resting.

Deepening a sense of purpose and connection while feeling spiritually grounded



A Sailor on a ship deck looking up at the North Star

supports resilience and emotional regulation. Physical energy and stamina support spiritual practices, whether it's prayer, meditation, nature walks, or simply service to others. A strong spiritual foundation often motivates better care of one's Body."

A Foundation for Success

Optimal performance is more than just being physically active and eating well; it is a result of deliberately strengthening and harmonizing one's Mind, Body, and Spirit. Making healthy behaviors part of one's daily routine builds and maintains Warrior Toughness. A strong foundation of healthy behaviors better prepares Sailors to get the most out of training and education, which is key to developing Warrior Toughness.

Sailors who exhibit healthy behaviors tend to excel at work, have more stable relationships, experience greater satisfaction in their job and life, have more self-confidence, be higher earners, and handle stressors more successfully.

Disciplined Choices

Obstacles to healthy behaviors can include a lack of motivation or willpower. According to CAPT Puskas, "...motivation alone is very



A fork in the road between healthy habits and unhealthy choices

difficult to live on. But discipline is the thing that we repeat day in and day out, and the way we create the conditions for discipline is that we make it easier to be disciplined.

It's important to be very intentional about making healthy choices every day. Walking by those pop tarts that are calling out to us and saying, 'I think bananas or apples are the better choice.' When Sailors make that a pattern day in and day out, Sailors get that compounding effect."

LCDR Williams states that when Sailors are feeling drained, motivation thrives on simplicity, purpose, and momentum. He advises Sailors to "... simplify the win. Choose one small healthy action. It could be as simple as stretching for 2 minutes, drinking a glass

of water, or preparing a single nutritious snack. These small moves matter. Stack those behaviors and link healthy actions to something they already do. Routine removes friction."

Healthy behaviors are a series of daily, small choices that add up to healthy habits.

Turning and Burning

In demanding operational environments, maintaining healthy behaviors takes intentional and consistent effort from Sailors. CAPT Puskas explains how he and a shipmate set themselves up to stay mission-ready and resilient by committing to a physical fitness routine.

"When I was a junior officer aboard the Perry-class frigate USS HALYBURTON (FFG-40), we were manned port and starboard, which meant we were continuously turning

and burning. Six hours on, six hours off watch rotation. Under those conditions, you can do things you wouldn't expect if you find a buddy.

My buddy and I made two commitments. We wouldn't mess around after our second watch of the day and go straight to bed, and we would get up 45 minutes earlier and get 30 minutes of active movement. All we had was a stair climber and a rickety old treadmill. We said each of us is going to do 10 minutes on the stair climber hard, a little over a mile on the treadmill, and some push-ups and sit-ups.

Find a buddy, get some sleep, and just take a little bit of time at the start or end of your day, whichever works better with your biorhythm, but make it a commitment to one other person. Hold each other accountable and you can go a long way in terms of leaving a deployment or an operational environment as healthy as you entered it."

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There are a lot of little things we can do along the way to help ourselves make good healthy choices.

CAPT Jonathon Puskas

Wrap-Up

Healthy behaviors help Sailors build the skills needed to promote resilience, enhance performance, and thrive both personally and professionally.

They develop the Mind through continuous reflection and learning; improve the Body by eating well, exercising regularly, and getting quality sleep; and strengthen the Spirit by staying connected to their why.

These habits are built through consistent, intentional effort and enable Sailors to become the best version of themselves.



Warrior Toughness Healthy Behaviors infographic

For more information, check out the videos and podcast about Healthy Behaviors.



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