
APPENDIX A

PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SEXES

Soldiers vary in their physical makeup. Each body reacts differently to varying degrees of physical stress, and no two bodies react exactly the same way to the same physical stress. For everyone to get the maximum benefit from training, leaders must be aware of these differences and plan the training to provide maximum benefit for everyone. They must also be aware of the physiological differences between men and women. While leaders must require equal efforts of men and women during the training period, they must also realize that women have physiological limitations which generally preclude equal performance. The following paragraphs describe the most important physical and physiological differences between men and women.

SIZE

The average 18- year-old man is 70.2 inches tall and weighs 144.8 pounds, whereas the average woman of the same age is 64.4 inches tall and weighs 126.6 pounds. This difference in size affects the absolute amount of physical work that can be performed by men and women.

MUSCLES

Men have 50 percent greater total muscle mass, based on weight, than do women. A woman who is the same size as her male counterpart is generally only 80 percent as strong. Therefore, men usually have an advantage in strength, speed, and power over women.

FAT

Women carry about 10 percentage points more body fat than do men of the same age. Men accumulate fat primarily in the back, chest, and abdomen; women gain fat in the buttocks, arms, and thighs. Also, because the center of gravity is lower in women than in men, women must overcome more resistance in activities that require movement of the lower body.

BONES

Women have less bone mass than men, but their pelvic structure is wider. This difference gives men an advantage in running efficiency.

HEART SIZE AND RATE

The average woman's heart is 25 percent smaller than the average man's. Thus, the man's heart can pump more blood with each beat. The larger heart size contributes to the slower resting heart rate (five to eight beats a minute slower) in males. This lower rate is evident both at rest and at any given level of submaximal exercise. Thus, for any given work rate, the faster heart rate means that most women will become fatigued sooner than men.

FLEXIBILITY

Women generally are more flexible than men.

LUNGS

The lung capacity of men is 25 to 30 percent greater than that of women. This gives men still another advantage in the processing of oxygen and in doing aerobic work such as running.

RESPONSE TO HEAT

A woman's response to heat stress differs somewhat from a man's. Women sweat less, lose less heat through evaporation, and reach higher body temperatures before sweating starts. Nevertheless, women can adapt to heat stress as well as men. Regardless of gender, soldiers with a higher level of physical fitness generally better tolerate, and adapt more readily to, heat stress than do less fit soldiers.

OTHER FACTORS

Knowing the physiological differences between men and women is just the first step in planning physical training for a unit. Leaders need to understand other factors too.

Women can exercise during menstruation; it is, in fact, encouraged. However, any unusual discomfort, cramps, or pains while menstruating should be medically evaluated.

Pregnant soldiers cannot be required to exercise without a doctor's approval. Generally, pregnant women may exercise until they are close to childbirth if they follow their doctors' instructions. The Army agrees with the position of the American College of obstetricians and Gynecologists regarding exercise and pregnancy. This guidance is available from medical authorities and the U.S. Army Physical Fitness School (USAPFS). The safety and health of the mother and fetus are primary concerns when dealing with exercise programs.

Vigorous activity does not harm women's reproductive organs or cause menstrual problems. Also, physical fitness training need not damage the breasts. Properly fitted and adjusted bras, however, should be worn to avoid potential injury to unsupported breast tissue that may result from prolonged jarring during exercise.

Although female soldiers must sometimes be treated differently from males, women can reach high levels of physical performance. Leaders must use common sense to help both male and female soldiers achieve acceptable levels of fitness. For example, ability-group running alleviates gender-based differences between men and women. Unit runs, however, do not.