

DCS, G-1, Human Resources Directorate

**General Information on AR 600-9
The Army Weight Control Program**

In 1981, the Department of Defense Directive (DODI 1308.1), Physical Fitness and Weight Control Programs, directed the Services to use body fat standards to assess obesity. The criteria for selecting methods for assessment of body composition in the military were that the measures must be: easily usable in the field; able to be made reliably; and be valid indicators of fatness. The directive was later amended in January 1987 requiring the Services to use a circumference-based method.

Although hydrostatic weighing is commonly thought to be the “gold standard” in body composition measurement, the Army circumference measurements are a more reliable method of estimating body fat. Hydrostatic weighing is not only a costly procedure, but is also greatly influenced by such factors as bone density and the individual’s state of hydration and lung volume. The assumptions for these factors may result in errors as much as two to three percent in estimated body fat. Individuals with lung disease, including all smokers, may not fully exhale and consequently, the body fat will be overestimated. There is also a problem in obtaining good hydrostatic weight measurements from non-swimmers who may be uncomfortable with performing maximal exhalation under water.

Per AR 600-9, The Army Weight Control Program, all Soldiers, regardless of rank, are weighed at six-month intervals to demonstrate that they are below tabled height for weight limits (divided by gender and into four age categories). If a Soldier exceeds body fat standards prescribed by gender and age, the unit commander must enter the Soldier into the Weight Control Program. The commander is required to provide motivational programs to the Soldier, including nutrition education sessions and exercise programs. As an additional incentive to achieve the standards, the Soldier’s records are flagged to prevent reenlistment, assignment to command positions, transfer to any professional schooling beyond initial entry training, and favorable actions, such as awards and promotions. A Soldier who fails to make satisfactory progress toward Army weight standards or fat loss may be discharged from the Army under a separation action for failure to meet the weight control standards.

Lean body mass, or body composition, is critical to successfully performing the jobs that require cardiac and respiratory endurance and muscular strength and endurance. According to research completed by the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, excess body fat can detrimentally affect a Soldier’s performance. Too much body fat can affect aerobic activities, such as running or carrying a full combat load under hostile conditions. The Army’s body fat standards are based on medical research indicating a relationship between

percent body fat and the incidence of health problems, such as high blood pressure, cancer, and diabetes.

Postpartum Soldiers

In March 1994, the Army extended the amount of time a postpartum Soldier is exempt from the Army Weight Control program and the Army Physical Fitness Test from 135 to 180 days. However, it is well established that Soldiers who maintain fitness during pregnancy experience less complications related to childbirth and more easily return to pre-pregnancy fitness levels after termination of pregnancy. This enhances both the readiness and morale of the Soldier and her unit.

To assist pregnant and postpartum Soldiers in maintaining fitness, many installations offer the Pregnancy Postpartum Physical Training (PPPT) Program developed by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine. This standardized program available to Soldiers who have been cleared by their health care provider, is scientifically based, safe, effective, and follows nationally established medical guidelines. It offers a variety of fitness classes led by personnel trained in pregnancy and postpartum fitness, as well as education on a variety of topics related to family life. The combination of exercise and education in the PPPT program also provides an ideal time for new expectant mothers to interact with experienced mothers and learn from them as well.