

they're comforting with food and in a sedentary job," she said. "And, in Iraq, it depends on where you are and what your job is if you can exercise."

Statistics uncollected

Regarding the new ability for flagged soldiers in the Weight Control Program to attend training courses, Hank Minitrez, spokesman for Army G-1, said Army officials do not know how many soldiers are flagged and in the Weight Control Program because those statistics are not kept above the company level. However, the recent policy change requires commanders to send those statistics to the Pentagon, beginning in January.

In August, the Army changed regulation 350-1 to say that while soldiers are still expected to meet body-fat and physical-training standards, they may attend "institutional training courses."

However, if they successfully completed the course but failed the PT test or to meet body-fat standards, their DA Form 1059 — Service School Academic Evaluation Report — would include a line stating "marginally achieved course standards" and a note saying the soldier did not pass fitness standards.

Soldiers' diplomas will be held at the school until the soldier passes the fitness standards, which must be met within three months or the failure will be noted on the 1059. Commanders also have the option to process soldiers out of the military if they have failed two physical fitness tests or don't show progress meeting body-fat standards.

The new rules don't apply to military courses that require separate physical fitness standards, such as Special Forces courses.

Six months to shape up

Army officials announced in October that all soldiers — even those who were already in the Weight Control Program — have six months to meet the new tape-test regs, Minitrez said. That includes Army, National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers.

That means soldiers flagged for not meeting the requirements have a grace period where they may be promoted, attend schools or receive a command assignment. The grace period ends March 31.

Those who don't meet standards will still be enrolled in the Weight Control Program; they just won't be subject to adverse personnel actions — at least during the grace period.

The number of soldiers chaptered out of the Army for weight violations in 2005 was 840 — down from 1,192 in 2000.

Master Sgt. C.J. Grisham said the measuring system needs further overhaul.

Women are measured at their necks, waists and hips because numerous studies have shown weight stored in the abdomen, rather than

the hips, is more likely to lead to health problems down the road.

For men, the test and weight standards and methods did not change, but the Army issued clearer guidance about how to perform a tape test properly.

Soldiers who don't meet the tape-test standards are normally flagged and not allowed to attend schools, take command positions

or be promoted. They can, however, be transferred to a new unit or deployed to combat zones.

Soldiers in the Weight Control Program meet with a nutritionist, participate in additional physical-fitness programs and check in with a doctor to make sure they don't have health problems contributing to weight problems. Normally, they are required to lose

three to eight pounds a month to show they are improving. If they don't, they can be chaptered out of the Army.

"The tape test is an obsolete system in my opinion, when there are more accurate methods out there," said Grisham, a military intelligence analyst at Fort Meade, Md., who served in Iraq in 2003.

He said that when he asked a

nurse to perform a body-fat test using an electric current, he measured in at 6 percent less body fat than when measured using the Army tape test.

"In terms of being placed on a weight control program, this is epic," he said. "The tape test does not account for people with different frames or those with naturally small necks." □



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