

Fleet considering video games to tone recruits

By Philip Ewing - Staff writer -- Navy times

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Today's tech-savvy young people could use their video game skills to get physically fit as new Navy recruits, using the equivalents of Nintendo's "Wii Fit" or Konami's "Dance Dance Revolution," to get started in boot camp, the Navy's top medical officer said.

Navy Surgeon General Vice Adm. Adam Robinson said using versions of such games, in combination with the traditional physical training that new sailors get at Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, Ill., would help newcomers to military service build up the endurance they need to get in shape safely.

"There are lots of programs now that people can [use to] become very physically active while they're using interactive computer games," Robinson said May 18 in an interview with Navy Times reporters and editors. "So, in other words, this isn't about [starting] with computers and stopping [everything else] — because we're not going to do that. This is about incorporating those types of activities into something that people can use to become more physically active."

The Navy might turn to computer-fitness aids because today's recruits enter the force needing much more work to get into fighting shape than in past years, Robinson said, given that many young people prefer computers and video games to the sports and physical activities of their predecessors. That doesn't mean the Navy can't make sailors out of today's young people, but it takes extra effort.

"I have no doubt that today's youth and the people that we're talking about are capable of becoming physically fit," Robinson said. "But I think that there has been a definite difference in the amount of time that people have devoted to physical activity, and I think that is a manifestation of physical education in the school systems in America."

One consequence of a less active youth culture is that women in boot camp suffer more bone injuries than recruits used to, Robinson said, because they're not used to the amount of standing and running that comes in recruit training.

"There is an issue in terms of physical fitness," he said. "There have been more fractures and femur fractures and long-bone fractures in some of our young female recruits, and that's related to the amount of activity and a sedentary lifestyle that they've had before they've entered the service and then the uptick in physical activity after they're in the service."

In the Navy, about 115 women per year suffer from stress fractures in boot camp, Naval Service Training Command spokeswoman Lt. Charity Hardison said. Officials have tried to tackle this problem by issuing new running shoes and letting people run on padded surfaces, she said.

Robinson said the concept of using video games to help with fitness is in its early stages; there's no timeline for when the first groups could begin to use them. He also said he wasn't personally familiar with games on the market today, or how they might be modified for the Navy's purposes.