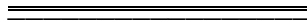


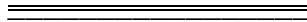
**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Educating Law Enforcement Agencies on Nutrition and Fitness



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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ABSTRACT

Safety plays a major role in the job of a police officer and being in physical condition and being healthy allows the officer to perform so that they are able to stay safe. Police officers need to be in the best physical condition in order to perform their job to best of their ability. Officers need to be physically fit so that they are able to defend themselves against those trying to harm them or others, chase after criminals who chose to run, and many other scenarios that require a physically fit person to fulfill the task at hand. Departments all over the country are looking into adding a nutritional program and a physical fitness program into their curriculum to help officers achieve being in physical shape. A good nutritional and physical fitness program will help officers maintain being in physical shape and provide the steps to achieve it. Not only will these programs help officers at work but also help officers in their daily lives.

Officers have to be willing to accept change and change for many people means trying something new. Adding a nutritional and physical condition program might cause hesitation to participate from officers. Adding programs like that to a department means taking time to do physical activity, spending money, and finding time on the job to maintain healthy habits. These are all factors that add to the challenge of being a police officer. Trying to convince officer's to try these programs might create negativity in the department and cause even more trouble for departments and officers.

There are ways to encourage officers to want to participate in programs that will help them maintain healthy and physical shape, and provide examples of how other departments such as the Los Angeles Police Department have implemented their health and nutritional program into their department.

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INTRODUCTION

Many police agencies in today's world have successfully incorporated fitness programs into their district, although this fitness initiative is still in the minority of departments. Some agencies have fitness standards as a requirement while other agencies just recommend that law enforcement officers should take the initiative to stay physically fit. Many police agencies have incorporated nutrition and fitness standards into departments, and they have invested time, money, and resources for this to happen. These investments have been used to purchase gym equipment, provide facilities for officers to be involved with meeting their physical standards, and have hired professional dieticians to assist officers in the right direction to eating healthy. Some agencies have reached out and even considered hiring professional trainers for their department. Having a healthy police department will reduce the cost of medical bills and time off due to lack of healthy officers. Police departments all over have gone through countless hours of research in efforts to incorporate and improve the physical fitness of the officers in their department as well as having the assistance from a dietician to assist in the nutritional factors. Therefore, it is very important that police departments all over our country should have a well structured nutrition and fitness program for their officers not in their job atmosphere but in their everyday life. It is crucial that our police men and women are given every opportunity and are encouraged to stay in their best possible physical shape for their success and survival.

It is vital to a police department to make sure their officers are aware of the effect of nutrition and staying in physical condition. When a department takes the time to educate officers on the importance of staying healthy, they are actually giving the officers the

help, support, and opportunity to obtain and/or maintain a healthier lifestyle. Officers will have a better outlook and attitude and will be better prepared to properly do their job to the best of their abilities. When an officer does not have to spend their own money and personal time staying healthy, there are no reasons or excuses for a police department to not have healthy, physically fit police officers. According to Roufa (2016), "Officers should have enough time between shifts, stay away from heavy food intake before going to bed. Officers should find a comfortable place to sleep. Officers should maintain a healthy diet and maintain physical activity to improve health and sleep" (Bullet 1).

Departments understand that police officers have obstacles trying to maintain their physical fitness and maintain a nutritional routine. The job itself is a contributing factor and the majority of police officers do not realize how quickly they can lose track of their upkeep. According to Vonk (2009), "Most police officers do care about their health, fitness levels and weight. Most, however, have no idea how much they actually eat in a day, and weight gain in the form of body fat slowly shows up over the years" (p. 10). If a department can find a way to be able to incorporate ways for officers to not only want to stay physically fit but also be aware of the health risk that come with the job, being healthy and being able to "defeat" the odds of becoming an unhealthy officer would be more appealing and more officers would take the extra steps to staying healthy.

POSITION

There have been many cases where the health of an officer is detrimental. For example, heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, and stress are all very high in law enforcement. Roufa (2016) discussed the research done by Dr. Violanti, which found that "40 percent of officers were obese compared to 32 percent of the general

population, and 25 percent of officers demonstrated signs of metabolic syndrome compared to 18.7 percent of the general population” (Bullet 1).

With so much time and effort being put into the physical aspect of the physical fitness programs for law enforcement agencies, lesser time and effort is being dedicated to the implementation and up keep of the nutritional aspect of the program. There are many different programs that are seen on television that promote physical fitness, such as Engine 2 Diet, Insanity, and CrossFit. All of these programs strive for the maximum levels of fitness and allow minimal “down time” between the changing of the exercises. In order for these programs to work, there not only needs to be the physical aspect but also the nutritional guide implemented into the equation for the programs to work to the fullest of their capability. If the physical as well as the nutritional aspects of these programs are met, it stands to reason that the program can be highly successful. There needs to be a strict guide in which a meal plan is included, not required but highly recommended for the best results. These programs state that there is a money back guarantee if the process is not what is expected but both physical fitness and the nutritional aspects have to be realized and accomplished. This is where many law enforcement agencies tend to fail. The departments are missing key factors that would support the full fitness for their officers.

The need to educate officers in the importance of nutritional value is critical. Some agencies have taken the initiative to hire nutritionists and/or dieticians to better acquaint and educate their officers. One example is from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Schreiber (2008) stated that “the LAPD wanted so much to improve the health of their officers, that they took money previously allotted to hire a

psychologist and hired a full-time, on-site dietician instead” (p. 10). The LAPD took the time to educate their officers as well as the new hires on the importance of nutritional principles. The talk of nutritional value was added into daily duties such as roll call, department meetings, and everyday discussions and conversations. This particular program was structured to have an impact of the importance of what weight and health really means to the police officers and the department. Once the officers were made aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, they started to realize how it not only benefitted themselves but the department as a whole. A dietician would assist, educate, and encourage police officers with setting up a proper healthy diet. These are all positive reinforcements that a department would need to have the support when bringing up the subject to the officers.

Dieticians and nutritionals can educate the officers on the values of eating certain foods and maintaining a nutritional diet but it is when the officers realize it for themselves that maintaining a nutritional lifestyle is important, the results start to show and the officers start to see the results. Educating officers on how important nutritional value is would prove to be important to not only each individual officer but the entire department as well. Officers should be taught how to properly evaluate themselves to make sure they have proper calorie readings, the proper heart rate; which is important to figuring out the calorie consumption, and their Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR). Making sure all these readings are at their proper levels is something a dietician would teach the officers which would assist them along the way with proper physical and nutritional attributes.

The job of a police officer is often compared to professional athletes. Mellor & Chimento (2014) believe that “law enforcement officers are tactical athletes; their work is not rewarded with gold medals, but their survival during confrontations with violent criminals is their victory” (p. 12). The job of a law enforcement officer is physically demanding and the key to meeting that physical demand is food. Mellor & Chimento (2014) state that “food is an energy source; it is essentially the fuel that the human body needs to function” (p. 13). It is important that officers are taught how to find a proper balance in their food selections as they go about their police duties. There are three primary nutrients that all humans need to consume as part of their daily eating habits. Each person is different in the suggested amounts of each nutrient, but as a whole these are the energy sources: fats, protein, and carbohydrates. Not only do officers need knowledge on what is good for them to eat but also what is good for them to work on physically. Physical strength and cardiovascular health are the physical aspects on which police officers need to concentrate their attention. One suggested way that an officer can eat healthier is preparing meals at home that do not require being reheated and are able to be eaten on the go such as finger foods. This allows officers to pack healthy food instead of having to go out to eat during their shift.

It is obvious that officers in bad and/or poor health cost police departments' money with having to take sick days and accumulating medical bills. Currently there are no records of any departments showing actual cost of medical bills and/or paid time off to officers that are not healthy enough to work. A healthy officer will use less sick time and be able to perform task more efficiently. Departments can use their command staff and or their supervisors as examples of what is expected and to ensure that their

officers are maintaining proper health and encourage healthy eating habits. When an officer has to take time off due to poor health, it not only puts the department in a financial bind but it also puts more pressure and demands upon the other officers who work with the unhealthy officer as well. According to Hooker (1994), "It can cost \$50,000.00 to train a new officer and the veteran officer's experience is forever lost" (p. 3). Medical bills and insurance claims will decrease. With this being the case, money is being saved by local governments and when saving money is involved, the administration will take an interest.

When departments decide to take on the task of trying to put into action a healthier way for officers to eat healthy and stay physically fit, departments have to portray equally the importance of the nutritional values as well as the physical aspect of the being healthy picture. Farmer (2004) believes that "physical exercise and diet must be done together. Think of it as a negative on a battery; if one end is not connected you have no power" (p. 34). If officers only maintain part of the healthy equation and lack in the other, they will not reap the benefits of the whole equation for a healthy lifestyle and are not going to reach its full potential strength. Emphasis on both physical fitness and nutrition is what a department really has to stress to its officers. Bringing in a dietician would be a way that nutrition could be emphasized and officers can be taught proper nutritional values. A dietician is a person whose job is to give people advice about what to eat in order to eat healthier. If a department had a dietician, officers could consult with the dietician on what food they should eat while they are on duty as well as proper eating habits at home. Mohajer (2008) recalls stories by Rana Parker, a dietician from Los Angeles Police Department; she jokes with the officers "I'm not the food police; I'm

just here to give them information, education and hopefully give them motivation to help themselves” (Health section, para. 2).

COUNTER POSITION

Working in law enforcement has its challenges when it comes to eating healthy while on the job. Long work hours, sitting in a car for extended periods at a time, and working night shift limits the amount of places open to eat. Officers who encounter these difficulties have a tendency to have a resistance to eating healthy because of the inconvenience of finding and or bringing healthy food to eat while working. After working long hours, officers want to go home and not take their personal time to go to the gym to work out so that they can stay physically fit. When new recruits come out of the academy, they are physically fit because they are on a physical fitness program during training. Oldham (2001) believes that once new recruits leave the training academy, “new recruits do not have the knowledge, time of desire necessary to maintain that physical fitness” (p. 75). Once this becomes the case, officer let their health go and before long their health and physical abilities start to fad and this is where resistance to the suggestion starts. Officer resistance is going to be something departments are going to have to be able to counteract if they want to implement nutrition and physical fitness into their department. Having a dietician in the department and giving police officers time to go to the gym would limit the resistance officers would have towards the idea. A dietician could have a nutrition plan for each of the officers and have a meeting set up for follow ups. Having a dietician in a department would allow officers come freely and be educated about nutrition as well as ask questions in regards to nutritional facts. Having a place for officers to stay physically fit would also

encourage officers to stay in shape. It would be a place for officers to converse and encourage each other to stay in shape. Making the subject of being healthy fun and easy is something that would be appealing.

When the subject of eating healthy or becoming physically fit is brought up, some police officers disregard the significance and importance of maintaining a healthy body. It is time consuming to sit down and plan healthy meals especially when one's job is law enforcement. According to Oldham (2011), "cops do not lead normal lives; no shift is the usual nine to five. It does not matter what division or job responsibility an officer has been assigned, they are all outside what a "normal" person experiences" (p. 75). There are many factors that have to be included when meal planning. However, officers can to use their off duty time to plan meals for their work week and can take into consideration the problematic situation of their working environment. Mellor & Chimento (2014) stated that "meals that do not need to be reheated, such as a salad topped with chicken, or bean and a pasta salad, and just need to be kept in a refrigerator or a cooler are particularly useful or in a vehicle while on patrol" (p. 13). Another suggestion for police departments to help and encourage their officers to eat healthier foods would be to stock the offices and/or cars with snacks that provide healthy nutrients to the officers. For example, nuts, energy bars, trail mix, and fruits are all foods that are health for the officer and would be totally acceptable for the work environment. When people see "unfit" or "unhealthy" officers they have a tendency to criticize their appearance as well as the ability to do the required work of an officer. When civilians see an officer that is "unfit", they have a tendency to make rude comments and some even lose respect for the officer. There are donut and coffee shop jokes, and cops called pigs all because of

the “unfit” officer look. Having officers that are in shape, have a clean and professional demeanor gives outsiders a different outlook and appreciation of officers. A dietician not only will help with nutritional values prevent officers from being out of shape, but also encourage officers to change what people think about them. An officer will have a higher opinion of themselves if they are in shape and people will not have the room to criticize their looks.

When people talk about money everyone pays attention. Money is a sensitive and controversial subject and since police departments run on a very tight budget taking money out of this already meager budget becomes a non-appealing topic for discussion. Hiring a dietitian for a department can become costly very quickly. Woodruff (2012) stated Kiel, president-elect of the Maryland Dietetic Association, said “...not everyone can afford to shell out the cash for a session, which can cost up to \$100.00 per hour” (para. 2). According to Lowery (2008) when Los Angeles Police Department decided to hire Rana Parker, their dietitian, they “paid her \$57,000.00” (para., 16). Departments would need to purchase gym equipment and find a facility such as a gym for the officers to use. Not only is the equipment costly but there other factors that have to be included, example, electricity, insurance, and maintenance. When all of the nutritional and physical factors add up, police departments are going to see dollar signs first. But, when looking at the overall big picture of health and fitness, one must consider whether this would really be that costly? It is obvious that healthy and physically fit police officers are much more effective and successful not only in their job but in their overall everyday life. Oldham (2001) stated that “every year more officers’ die from heart attacks or disease related to the degradation of the body than all those

who die from violent attacks and traffic accidents combined. Even more officers are forced to retire early because of similar conditions” (p. 75).

It is a shame to not encourage, allow, and provide proper physical conditioning of those who safe guard and protect the rest of the population. From the get-go, nutrition and physical fitness should be a top priority for our police officers. According to Mellor & Chimento, “Overall, working in law enforcement in not an excuse for a poor diet” (p. 13).

RECOMMENDATION

There is a definite need for a complete nutritional and physical fitness program in all law enforcement agencies. Poor health and a line of diseases come from being in the law enforcement work; it is crucial that all officers practice healthy nutrition and maintain physical fitness in order to minimize these negative health problems. It is a necessity that healthy foods be encouraged in an officer’s meal to lower the risk of obtaining the poor health issues that comes with the job. It is a necessity that law enforcement understands how crucial that proper nutrition and physical fitness are.

When nutrition is taught properly and understood, a positive outcome will come from the understanding and law enforcement agencies will have a better grasp of how to move forward with this. A more-fit image of an agency will result in more respect and acceptance in the department from civilians. Society has always put law enforcement officers at a higher standard for their dedication and acceptance of the danger of the job. If society sees an unfit officer, a negative view is not only on that officer but other officers and a department as a whole. Over all, it is extremely important that all law enforcement agencies implement a complete nutritional and physical program in their department.

It is common knowledge that police agencies all over operate with a very minimal budget. It is also known that health related issues are extremely expensive. Unfortunately law enforcement is not exempt when it comes to health costs. They are billed just the same. According to Shell (2005), "Union Pacific was able to save 2 million dollars after implementing a wellness program, which resulted in the cutting of costs incurred through medical needs (p. 28). Shell (2005) further emphasized that "up-front preparation in ensuring wellness in law enforcement academies and beyond can prove far less costly than not doing so. Lifelong wellness, and fitness proves an investment now, and in the future of American public safety personnel" (p. 29). Overall, police departments should apply a complete nutritional and physical fitness program for their officers.

Police officers will demonstrate a higher level of fitness when they are at the correct levels in nutrition and in fitness. This will allow officers to not only present themselves in appearance but also in the duties that are required as an officer. Vonk (2009) stated that since "cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of law enforcement, making healthy nutrition choices and staying physically fit will add years and quality of life with your family" (p. 30). It is very fortunate that there are ways for police departments to help their officers to achieve the best nutritional education and provide the best physical fitness opportunity for their officers, sure there are always obstacles but no obstacle is too difficult when it comes to the health of our police officers.

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