

US fitness guru urges yoga for fat soldiers

July 17 2010, by Virginie Montet

Asked by the US military for tips to help combat the growing problem of obesity in the ranks, a popular television fitness guru came up with an unusual answer: mind-soothing and body-bending yoga.

"I know inclusion of [yoga](#) in military training sounds a tad alien," Tony Horton, 52, acknowledged as he presented his techniques to a group of 200 people, many clad in gymwear, at the National Press Club in Washington.

"The days of push ups, sit ups and long runs in the military are over," said Horton, whose functional fitness concept combines equipment-free, body weight-based exercises with push-ups, sit-ups and yoga postures.

"Yoga magnifies the positive effects of strength and cardiovascular exercises," he said. "It's lubricating all the major joints and reduces the potential for injury."

The fitness trainer best known for his trendy "P90X" workout regime has trained celebrities like Usher, Bruce Springsteen and Sean Connery, as well as soldiers at military bases, including Andrews Air Force Base and Fort Bragg.

As Horton demonstrated, men and women of all sizes struck yoga poses, arms and feet outstretched.

"Obesity is a national security issue," Horton said, repeating a warning issued earlier this year by two senior retired generals, John Shalikashvili

and Hugh Shelton, both former chairs of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"People are too fat to fight," the fitness trainer added.

Pentagon studies say the military's obesity rate has nearly doubled since 2003. According to Horton, the military saw its obesity rate nearly triple from 1995 to 2008 alone, while the overall number of obese troops has grown from 1.6 percent in 1998 to 4.4 percent in 2008.

In the United States as a whole, more than two thirds of states now have an adult [obesity](#) rate above 25 percent, Horton said. In contrast, not a single state had a rate above 20 percent in 1991.

The US military also faces a problem with troops already serving who are overweight, Horton said.

"The failure to meet fitness standards has meant each year thousands have had to deal with canceled promotions, loss of education opportunities," he added.

"The statistics are profoundly disturbing."

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