



First Responder Fitness



Law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency responders, and military service members are “tactical athletes” whose physical fitness is crucial to their safety.

Fitness programs for these first responders should focus on preparation for occupational activities, including lifting, dragging, pushing, dodging, sprinting, climbing, and grappling. The information below will help Members identify elements to add to their exercise programs.

Mobility:

Mobility training helps prevent muscles from becoming tight and immobile, which can lead to potential injuries. Better mobility directly benefits a first responder because they are frequently placed in awkward or compromising positions as part of their job duties.

- Warm up – this should last 5 to 10 minutes; start slowly, then pick up the pace
- Stretches – static stretching can improve range of motion, and dynamic stretching may help lower risk of injury
- Cool down – allows the body to transition to recovery

Strength:

Strength training, like lifting weights or using resistance bands, builds muscles and protects joints. Strength levels can directly impact a first responder’s ability to perform with additional gear or under stress.

- Functional exercise – use exercises that closely relate to your job functions
- Program oriented – follow a certified strength program to avoid overtraining
- Proper technique – avoids injuries

Conditioning:

Aerobic exercise, like running or swimming, makes your heart stronger and helps your body optimize oxygen. Conditioning prepares first responders for their duties, and it also plays a crucial role in injury prevention. Conditioning directly impacts the ability to chase a suspect or respond to a fire or other emergency.

- High Intensity – one high intensity session per week can boost aerobic capacity and lower blood pressure
- Rowers – rowers engage 80 percent of muscles through low impact training
- Cross training - a great way to condition different muscle groups

Recovery:

Rest days are critical for any person performing exercise. Rest days help with muscle recovery, mental health, and prevent overtraining injuries.

- Nutrition – opt for healthy nutrient-dense food over fast-food
- Sleep – healthy adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night
- Days off – avoid strenuous activities like construction or yard work on days off

Additional Resources:

- [Firefighter/EMT Fitness: Ready for the Call Initiative](#)
- [Texas Department of Public Safety Fitness Institute](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration Emergency Services Ergonomics and Wellness](#)
- [Texas Police Chiefs Association: VINCIBLE](#)
- [International Association of Chiefs of Police – Reducing Officer Injuries](#)