

RFI Category and Number:

*Military Services' Physical Fitness Test
RFI 8 i*

RFI Question:

Current policies for iron or other supplements provided to female recruits.

RFI Response:

Currently there are no existing policies related to routinely providing supplements (iron or others) to female recruits. However, if medically indicated they are provided. Female recruits receive a women's health assessment during in-processing, including a review of any medications or supplements they may be taking. If there are risk factors at that time (positive sickle cell trait, for example), or they become symptomatic during training (fainting) they will receive further testing for anemia. Additionally, during this assessment, female recruits are offered pre-natal vitamins which include folic acid and iron.

The National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements, provides a fact sheet for Health Professionals on Dietary Supplements for Exercise and Athletic Performance. Research shows that iron supplements improve work capacity with correction of iron deficiency anemia, but there is conflicting evidence on whether milder iron deficiency without anemia impairs exercise performance. Adverse effects of iron supplements include gastric upset, constipation, nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting and fainting (at intakes above 45 mg/day). One typical iron tablet is 325 mg/day. Therefore routine administration of iron to individuals with a balanced diet may cause adverse side effects with little proven benefit.

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/ExerciseAndAthleticPerformance-HealthProfessional/>

The Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) provides extensive information for warfighters, their families, providers and leaders on "Operation Supplement Safety"

<https://www.opss.org>. This website provides a list of high risk supplements

<http://www.opsshighrisksupplementlist.org/#OPSSHighRiskList>, as well as general information on the use of supplements (<https://www.opss.org/get-scoop-supplements>).

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