Seven steps to preventing outdoor, sports related injuries

By Lts. Katsuya Iizuka and Shawn Spooner, USNH Yokosuka

Pull on those hiking boots; it's time to climb Mount Fuji! It is estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 people attempt to climb Mount Fuji each year. Making this climb can be good for your health, fun and a memorable part of your time in Japan; however, there is a tremendous potential for injuries from climbing. Below are seven steps you can take to help prevent injuries related to mountain climbing or any outdoor sporting activity.

• Achieve and maintain a healthy level of fitness. To maintain good health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adults complete 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity each week and muscle strengthening activities two times a week. If you try to climb and you are not physically ready, you are at risk for injury, not making it to the top or not being able to make it back down. Fitness is essential in order to complete the climb.

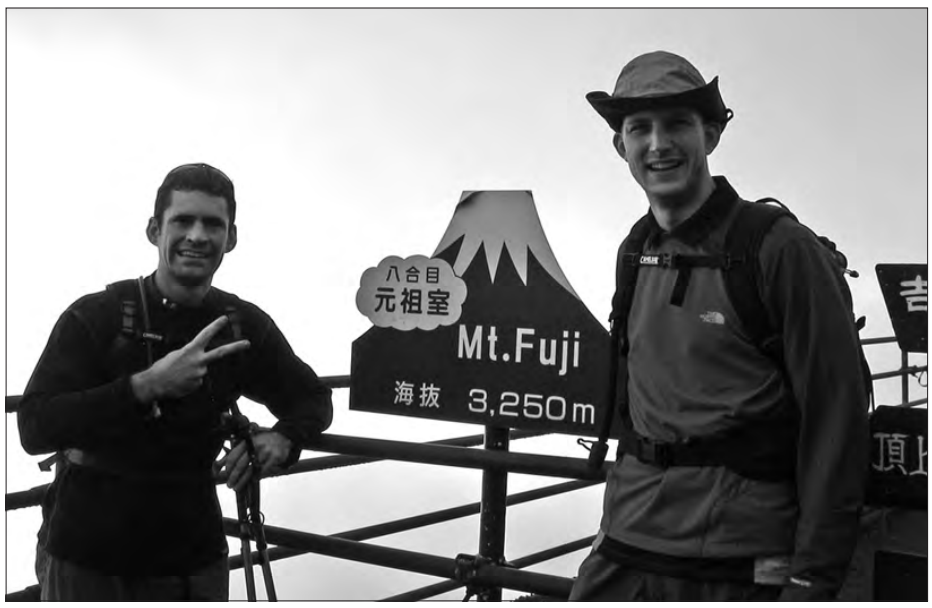
• Make sure you have the proper equipment. To prevent injuries and perform well, you must have good equipment. Get shoes that fit right and have adequate ankle support. If you have weak ankles, consider taping them or wearing a brace for additional support. Backpacks should be the appropriate size for your stature and have a waist belt to provide a better center of gravity and prevent back injury.

• Protect yourself from ultraviolet (UV) rays. You can do this by avoiding direct sun light for prolonged periods or during peak hours by applying sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 and wearing sunglasses to protect your eyes.

• Always warm up. This may be easily forgotten when you are staring up at Mount Fuji and are ready to start your ascent, but this is a critical step. The goal is to literally warm the body up, not just stretch. Stretching may be good for preventing some injuries, but it should only be performed after your muscles are warm and active. To warm your body up for climbing, start walking at a slow pace with short strides for five to 10 minutes before increasing the pace and stride.

• Know your pace. After the warm up, identify and keep a pace that is comfortable for you. The body can be just like a car in this sense: if the revolutions per minute (RPM) stays in the red zone too long, it will overheat. The same goes for you. If you overexert yourself for too long, your body may burn out, leading to injuries and, in worst cases, death.

• Be safe. Know and obey the rules. While climbing, don't go to off-limit areas and always use common sense.



Lts. Doug Szwarc and Jeff DeGroot from CSG 7, take a break at level 8 during their climb of Mount Fuji last year. It is estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 people attempt to climb Mount Fuji each year. Making this climb can be good for your health and a memorable part of your time in Japan; however, there is a tremendous potential for injuries from climbing.

• Don't forget to cool down. Once you complete the climb, cool your body down by moving your legs, arms and abdomen at a slow pace for at least five minutes. This will reduce lactic acid build up and decrease the degree of muscle pain and cramping after the climb.

Follow the steps outlined above and you should have a great story about climbing Mount Fuji to share with your friends and family. And, in case an injury does occur, always remember RICE. RICE stands for rest, ice, compression and elevation. Make sure you rest the injured area, apply ice and light compression and keep it elevated. If you notice an obvious deformity, intolerable pain or no improvement and worsening pain, seek medical advice.

President cites post-traumatic stress disorder reduction as priority

By Donna Miles,
American Forces Press Service

President Barack Obama joined the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) secretary Aug. 4 to discuss a broad range of veterans issues, including his commitment to tackling the causes behind post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and providing resources to help.

Citing the direct correlation between military deployments and PTSD, Obama said he's hopeful that increasing the size of the force will help to reduce incidents of stress.

"There is a direct connection between the problems of PTSD and the pace of military operations," Obama told military reporters during a roundtable interview at the White House.

"As we are phasing down our operations in Iraq, we're going to see fewer PTSD cases coming out of Iraq," he said. "As we're seeing increased velocity of operations in Afghanistan, that's going to put more strain on the military personnel who are located there."

Faced with that hard reality–one he said he takes to heart as he deploys troops in the first place–Obama said he wants to reduce the incidents of PTSD. And one of the best ways to do that, he said, is "to reduce the amount of time in theater without a break."

Obama noted steps he's taken to increase the size of the military, particularly the Army and Marine Corps, which have been most heavily stressed with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

He also gave Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates authority to advance the Army's growth to end its "stop-loss" policy more quickly. The unpopular policy keeps some Soldiers in uniform beyond the terms of their enlistment contracts.

The president also approved Gates' recommendation to temporarily boost the Army's active force by 22,000 members, a move expected to begin making an impact in January.

"All those things are going to make a difference in reducing stress, because what you've seen is that the incidents of post-traumatic stress disorder increase with each deployment," the president said.

President Barack Obama delivers remarks to service members and civilians during a visit to U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune. Obama joined the VA secretary Aug. 4 to discuss a broad range of veterans issues, including his commitment to tackling the causes behind PTSD and providing resources to help.
U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Michael J. Ayotte

But Obama called that just the first step in addressing the issue. Identifying people with symptoms of PTSD and getting them help also are key to a comprehensive approach.

"Step number two is making sure that we are doing the screening that's necessary so that problems don't fester, and eliminating the stigma that may have historically existed when somebody is showing symptoms of PTSD–particularly if they're still in theater, or still on active duty," he said.

The military has been working hard to change that paradigm, he noted. "I think that you've seen steps both within all the armed forces to talk about these issues, encourage people to avail themselves of services while they're in theater, but also when they get home," he said.

The president recognized "much more aggressive, systemic screening" VA conducts for every veteran entering its system.

The third step in addressing PTSD is to provide mental health services to those who need them.

Obama said his fiscal 2010 budget, which includes the largest VA funding increase in 30 years, will help to confront PTSD and traumatic brain injuries in a "more robust way."

"Throwing money at the problem by itself is not enough," he conceded. But, he added, money does help by funding more counselors, mental health specialists and treatment facilities.

Obama said he's seen a change in attitudes about PTSD since the Vietnam era. "And I think both [the Defense Department] and VA take the issue of PTSD very seriously," he said.

"I'm confident that we're moving in the right direction," Obama said. "We're putting resources behind it. We're putting time and energy behind it. I'm focused on it personally. But it's going to take some time."