

Healthy food can be painfully difficult to find on base.



# Lack of support

## Corps wants slimmer Marines while offering fattening chow

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The writer is an active-duty gunnery sergeant assigned to Camp Lejeune, N.C.

**T**he Corps is cracking down on Marines who let their weight slide out of control, but it's not doing enough to provide us with the proper nutrition that will help keep the pounds from piling up.

Walk into any post exchange and what do you see? Twinkies, potato chips, cookies, frozen hamburgers and burritos. It's a similar story at chow halls, where the healthiest food is found at the salad bar, and at the host of fast-food joints around most bases.

If Marines were given appropriate nutritional education and healthier options, everyone would stand a better chance at meeting the

service's strict new weight guidelines, which say Marines are not in standard when their body fat exceeds 18 percent for men and 26 percent for women. Obviously, a basic guideline for maintaining a healthy body weight is to eat a variety of healthy foods — those low in fat, saturated fat and cholesterol — yet such fare can be painfully difficult to find on base.

Chow halls at Camp Lejeune, N.C., for example, are run off a strictly regimented menu maintained by a retired lieutenant colonel. It tells the chow halls what they have to cook each day and how to cook it — down to the amount of salt. Most chow halls on base have a main line that serves two entrees, a starch and a vegetable, and a fast-food line that serves mostly hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, french fries and onion rings.

The chow halls are trying to serve healthier fare by using more precooked foods and sauces along with zero-trans fat oils, but the food is still fattening. Santo Fe glazed chicken: 435 calories, 20.3 grams of fat. Barbecue pork spare ribs: 597 calories, 40.5 grams of fat. And that's just one meal out of three in a day.

I understand needing a lot of calories when you're in the field, but that is what Meals, Ready to Eat are for. Is it too much to ask the Marine Corps to devise a healthier menu?

As for fast food, we know it is unhealthy, but Marines nonetheless fill lines waiting for their fat burger and fries, and for what reason? So they can get a quick, easy meal and have more time to mess around before they have to return to work.

Quick grub is all too easy to come by on base. There's Burger King, Domino's, Dunkin' Donuts and Subway, which is the healthiest fast-food chain on base — depending what you put on your sandwich.

The PX has low-carb wraps and salads, but they are in short supply. The manager there told me that the small selection of healthy food in her PX was "not from the lack of her trying" but from a lack of choices from her supplier, Coastal Wholesale Grocery. She said also there is limited space on her shelves for healthy food — but that she would make room if her supplier had more to offer.

I am convinced that if we had healthier options, more Marines would seek them. Is it too much to ask that we have healthier eating establishments on base? Is it too much to ask that the Corps steps in to regulate this?

I eat most of my lunches in the chow hall, and after looking at what is being served, I often chop up a grilled chicken breast and throw it into a salad. Eating the same thing every day gets old, but I am stuck until the chow hall offers a healthier selection.

Marines are adults, and we have a choice in what we eat, but we are also held accountable for unhealthy eating habits. How can the Corps hold us accountable to its weight standards when most of the food it makes available to us is high in calories and saturated fat? □

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