

Study: Stressing the mind helps train the body

By Bradley Stulberg, Outside

In an until-recently classified report funded by the UK's Ministry of Defence, researchers revealed something remarkable: you can reap enormous performance gains by altering your perception of effort—and anyone can do it.

Historically, scientists and athletes have thought of the stress that leads to fitness gains as being physical—training longer, running faster, or jumping higher. In recent years, researchers have begun to explore the mental component of training—how visualization can improve performance. But until now, few researchers have examined how mental stress can lead to training adaptations similar to physical stress.

In the MOD study, thirty-five soldiers trained three times a week on stationary bikes for the experiment, riding each time for the same duration and intensity relative to their own baseline fitness. In addition to the physical effort, half of the soldiers were also asked to engage in a mentally demanding task—watching combinations of letters appear on a computer screen and clicking only when certain combinations appear—while they pedaled.

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