



Enlisting in the Military: What to Expect

As is the case when starting any career, knowing what to expect when joining the Military will make adjusting to new surroundings and experiences easier and ultimately more rewarding.

Start your research with the resources presented here and then, when you're ready, **a recruiter** can provide more information about specific Service branches.



Enlistment

How the Enlistment Process Works

Joining the Military is not as simple as signing on the dotted line. First, candidates must meet all of the Service requirements, which are typically assessed at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). There's a MEPS in every state where candidates for all Service branches come to enlist. The process usually takes about two days.

At a MEPS, recruits may do the following:

- Take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test
- Receive physical and medical examinations
- Meet with a counselor and select a career path
- Take the Oath of Enlistment (swearing in)

After finishing at the MEPS, recruits follow one of two paths:

- **Direct Ship:** Report to Basic Training shortly after finishing MEPS requirements.
- **Delayed Entry Program (DEP):** Commit to Basic Training at a time in the future, generally within one year. For example, a recruit goes through MEPS the summer after junior year in high school, and then commits to Basic Training after senior year.

GOOD TO KNOW: Departure Dates

The time period between being sworn in and entering Basic Training could be as short as a few days or as long as 12 months. It varies based on job assignment and branch.

Basic Training

How to Prepare for Basic Training

These tips can help recruits prepare and make Basic Training easier to handle.



Incorporate cardio workouts, weight training, situps and pushups into daily routines. Jogging, bike riding and exercise classes can also help improve cardiovascular fitness.



Get personal matters in order prior to leaving, including who will handle day-to-day issues such as paying bills, minding mail and dealing with bank accounts.



Increase discipline and get accustomed to a regular schedule. Every aspect of initial training is regimented, and there is no activity that does not have a specific amount of time allocated — from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night.



Take some time to learn about military culture. Military life is different from civilian life. For example, in the Services, people use a lot of acronyms, salute higher-ranking members and get promoted via a rank structure. Read books and websites about the Military or talk to someone who is serving or has served recently.

Packing for Basic Training

There are strict rules covering what recruits can and cannot bring to Basic Training. Requirements vary from Service to Service, but this list is a good starting point. A recruiter will be able to help make sure recruits have any additional items they may need. Any contraband (items not allowed) will be taken when you arrive on base.

DO BRING:

- Toiletries (toothpaste, shaving supplies, shampoo, soap and soap case, shower shoes, etc.)
- Eyeglasses, if needed (contact lenses are not permitted by most Services)
- Underwear and athletic socks
- Casual, comfortable clothes for leisure time
- Pair of comfortable shoes
- Luggage (small suitcase or gym bag)
- Important paperwork pertaining to prescriptions
- At least \$25, but no more than \$50, in cash
- ATM or debit card
- Family mailing information to keep in touch using the U.S. Postal Service

DO NOT BRING:

- Family
- Pets
- Expensive personal items — cameras, personal electronic devices, laptops, jewelry, etc.
- Nonprescription drugs or drug paraphernalia
- Weapons of any type, including pocket knives
- Obscene or pornographic material
- Alcoholic beverages
- Playing cards/dice/dominoes
- Cigarettes/tobacco products

What Happens During Basic Training

This can be an emotional time, since recruits have limited contact with family and friends while away. Each recruit is allowed a brief phone call home to let family know they've arrived safely. After that, all communications are restricted to postal mail only.

GOOD TO KNOW: Keeping in Touch

Recruits are generally not allowed to make phone calls or use email during Basic Training. However, they may send and receive postal mail. After Basic Training, recruits are allowed to use phone, email or instant messaging, just like everyone else.

The first few days at Basic Training are known as Orientation (also referred to as Processing Week, Reception or 00 Week). During this time, recruits get acquainted with each other, adjust to their new life and learn the dos and don'ts of their chosen Service branch.

In addition, recruits may:

- Turn in enlistment packages (paperwork from the MEPS)
- Receive dental and medical exams
- Get immunizations

- Receive uniforms and training gear (shorts/sweats, T-shirts, etc.)
- Receive required haircuts (women may keep their hair long, provided it can be pulled back neatly)
- Create direct deposit accounts for military paychecks

What Happens During Basic Training

	ARMY	MARINE CORPS	NAVY	AIR FORCE	COAST GUARD
LOCATION(S)	<p>Fort Benning Columbus, Georgia</p> <p>Fort Jackson Columbia, South Carolina</p> <p>Fort Leonard Wood Waynesville, Missouri</p> <p>Fort Sill Lawton, Oklahoma</p>	<p>Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina</p> <p>Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California</p>	<p>Great Lakes Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, Illinois</p>	<p>Lackland Air Force Base San Antonio, Texas</p>	<p>Cape May Coast Guard Training Center Cape May, New Jersey</p>
LENGTH	10 weeks	12 weeks	7-9 weeks	7.5 weeks	8 weeks
Subsequent Training Opportunities	Advanced Individual Training (AIT)	<p>Infantry or Combat Training</p> <p>Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Training*</p>	"A" School	Technical Training School	Class A School*

*This type of training is only available for those in specific career fields.

What Happens After Basic Training

Once a recruit completes Basic Training, they are an official member of the Military. Friends and family are encouraged to attend the Basic Training graduation ceremony if tickets are available — it's an emotional moment that deserves recognition.

And while the timing and process varies by Service branch, eventually all service members will go on after graduation to receive additional training — such as Advanced Individual Training (AIT) — to develop the skills needed to do a specific job. Once finished, service members are transferred to their first duty station to put all that training to good use. To learn more about the differences in advanced training by Service, please [**Speak with a recruiter.**](#)