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TOP 6 FITNESS MYTHS

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If you asked a hundred people at a gym what information sources influenced their current fitness routine, you'd likely get a broad mix of good conversations and blank stares. Some people do a version of what they see other people doing. Some do what they read about in a magazine or what they were told to do in gym class many years (or decades) ago. Still others choose a blend of guidance from a trainer and ideas they gather from their favorite fitness websites.

What nearly all of these people would agree on, however, is the importance of efficiency. No one wants to spin their wheels during their workout time. They want results! This said not all fitness routines will get you there in the fastest (or safest) way with the best outcomes. Think about your own fitness program for a minute. Are you following the latest exercise science and personalized programming? Or might you be working from an outdated, erroneous or inefficient model? Check out these six common fitness misconceptions – and see how they might reflect your past (or present) routine.

Myth: Training for a marathon is a great weight loss strategy.

Fact -

Running many miles hours each week isn't the foolproof plan many believe it is for fat loss.

Striving for athletic achievement is great, and it's generally far healthier than spending time at the bar, but the process of training for a marathon (or other 3+ hour intensive event) is arduous. It requires large amounts of calories burned - obsessively at times. It might surprise you that just as many people gain weight while training for a marathon as those who lose weight.

Think about it.... The average 12-16 week marathon training program increases in both mileage and intensity nearly every week. While this may be a positive thing for muscular and aerobic fitness, it also comes at quite a cost: appetite increase.

That's right. Training for an endurance event often results in such an increase in appetite that it's more than enough to offset the amount of energy burned in the low to moderate intensity miles. The net effect of refueling with frequent helpings of sugary or refined carbohydrate "running fuel" is equal parts glycogen restoration and fat tissue maintenance.

Instead, I'd advise those looking to get fitter or leaner to seek out monthly 5k's, run a few interval sessions each week, and walk or lightly jog frequently between weight training sessions.

Do this while eating unprocessed food consisting of mostly vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Your waistline will shrink while your fitness level grows – without the arduous output.

Myth: Working out for an hour is a proven benchmark for weight loss, and shorter workouts just aren't worth it.

Fact -

A short workout is better than no workout.

What if you kept all other factors as equal as possible and compared groups of people on the same exact eating program while having one group exercise twice as long as the other? Well, the results of one such study actually showed a slight weight loss and fat loss advantage to the "lazier" group who exercised half as much.

You read correctly. Subjects exercising about 30 minutes six times per week vs. about 60 minutes six times per week lost approximately the same amount of weight (but slightly more fat) over the course of 12 weeks.

Exercise is merely a stimulus on the body – a trigger for change, whether it's a change in neuromuscular coordination, aerobic capacity, strength, speed or power. The actual change occurs between sessions and not during the session.

Some people, especially those new to structured exercise or those who are de-conditioned, may not have the ability to adapt to physical training that leaves them worn out. In other words, workouts that are shorter but allow for more complete recovery time may be a more effective “dose” for many people.

It's also well understood that challenging workout programs may actually cause a reduction in normal non-exercise daily activity in the majority of the population. That's right. If you exercise hard for an hour before work, researchers often find you'll subconsciously reduce activity you'd normally do in your day as a compensatory measure. You might also eat more without realizing it.

Tip: explore what your minimum effective dose is for strenuous exercise. Do it consistently, and keep active as much as possible outside your sessions (e.g. take the stairs, park farther away, or walk 5 minutes of every hour you're awake)

Myth: Women (or men) should lift light weights for high reps to work on muscle “tone.”

Fact -

Light resistance and high reps are appropriate for a few weeks when first starting formal resistance training in de-conditioned adults – but only to challenge muscular endurance (tolerance) for the exercise and not for building tone.

Going from no weight training to 3-5 sets of 12-20 reps may be necessary for establishing proper form, posture, muscle recruitment, and coordination. To look leaner or stronger, however, you will eventually need to push your muscles to failure under heavier loads.

Don't get me wrong: most people need a few weeks of higher repetitions to establish excellent range of motion, safe control of their bodies and movement patterns, and connective tissue elasticity (which also relies on quality dietary fats and abundant minerals).

When it comes to muscle maintenance or building during a weight loss program (i.e. when someone may be consciously trying to create a calorie deficit either through increased activity or dietary restriction), heavier resistance training along the “5-10 reps for 5-10 sets” model shows better muscle stimulus than lighter training.

Studies of weight loss programs frequently conclude that groups that follow the heaviest resistance training protocols combined with highest protein and vegetable intakes preserve the most strength and lean tissue and suffer fewer injuries. Without stimulating lean tissue growth through heavier training, it seems most weight loss programs fail to help participants appear more toned at a lighter weight. They may look more slender and be lighter, but it's actually rather difficult to appear stronger without lifting heavy things as part of the program.

If you don't feel safe enough trying your hand at heavier weights just yet, ask a fitness professional about joining small group training, or consider hiring a fitness pro at least on a monthly basis to guide your program through proper phases.

Myth: The highest rate of fat burn occurs at very low intensities.

Fact -

Increasing fat metabolism and fitness, thus making fat loss more likely, requires exercise across all spectrums of intensities.

High intensity exercise costs more calories, but most of those calories will come from stored glycogen or glucose (carbs), while low intensity exercise allows for easier fat oxidation. So, the highest *percentage* of fat utilization occurs at relatively low intensity exercise, but the highest absolute fat oxidation usually occurs somewhere between "easy" work and top-end effort.

Confused? In your lower exercise zones, you may notice a higher *percentage* of fat metabolisms than you do in higher zones, but somewhere in the middle is where the *rate* of fat utilization may be greatest.

If you've done an Active Metabolic Assessment, you probably know these secrets about how to coax the most fat burn out of your system. If you haven't, don't worry! There's still time to zero in.

Here's a hint: you can elevate your fat metabolism even more if you warm up properly and if you go into workouts with very stable blood sugar control (and sometimes even slight carbohydrate restriction).

Myth: Machines are a more effective place to start resistance training because they keep your form safe.

Fact:

Walking into most fitness facilities might lead you to believe machines are the bee's knees, but you may notice your nearest Life Time is actually slowly creating more space for natural movement – empty floors that allow us to move our bodies without the constraints of machines.

Resistance training machines do offer some safer alternatives for doing weighted exercises without a spotter, but they can also limit our performance potential. Nothing accelerates neuromuscular coordination and muscle fiber recruitment more than proprioceptive movement through natural and full ranges of motion like those performed strictly under body weight, free-space activity.

Read another way, learning to move through space in multiple planes of motion – bending, twisting, reaching, pulling and pressing – while consciously focusing on staying upright is a much better way to establish a fitness foundation or increase your fitness potential.

Once you've learned to move more freely and completely within your own body (and it no longer hurts), you'll be ready to benefit from external loads (e.g. free weights or machines).

Myth: A great workout can be judged by how much your towel weighs afterward.

Fact:

No pain, no gain, right? Sweating may be a great way to help your body detoxify, but there are also great workouts that produce amazing results with little sweat produced. Many of us still hear the "gym teacher voice" in the back of our minds telling us to "go hard or go home," but that's often the mentality that increases physical strain and potential for injury, induces blood sugar roller coasters and wild appetites, or even more pain than gain.

A great workout should be judged based on how much better you did today than last week or last month, how much more energized and motivated you feel, and how much better your body is moving at the end of the workout than it was at the beginning.

Summary

Thanks for reading, everyone. Are you interested in support for assessing your exercise program? This article is not intended for the treatment or prevention of disease, nor as a substitute for medical treatment, nor as an alternative to medical advice. Use of recommendations in this is at the choice and risk of the reader

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