



Weighing in on Getting Thin: Finding the truth behind fitness myths

With so many “experts” claiming knowledge on myriad fitness routines, how does the average consumer know whom to believe? Some people follow a low-fat diet; others think a low-carbohydrate diet is the way to go. Some work out twice a day, while others are lucky to make it to the gym twice a week. How can we be sure that we’re doing the right things to promote a healthy lifestyle? One way is to dispel some of the myths that might be doing us more harm than good.

Myth 1: If you’re not at the gym an hour a day, five days a week, you might as well forget it.

Not true. You stand to reap great benefits even if you exercise just a little every day. Studies show a half-hour walk three or more times a week significantly reduces your risk of heart attack and stroke, lowers blood pressure, relieves stress, and boosts your energy and immune system.

Myth 2: Warming up before working out isn’t necessary if you’re careful.

If you believe this one, you could end up with a serious injury. Gently stretching and warming up your muscles before and after you exercise is the No. 1 defense against many injuries.

Myth 3: The best time to exercise is early in the morning.

The best time to exercise is whatever time works for you. If you’re not a morning person, start your fitness routine after work.

Myth 4: Exercising the same body part every day is the fastest way to strengthen it.

This can cause injury. To build strength, work your muscles hard but be sure to give them rest. “Every muscle needs time to recover depending on how hard you work it,” said Jill Garrigan, a fitness coordinator for Intercollegiate Athletics at Penn State University in University Park, PA.

Myth 5: If I’m not sore the next day, I didn’t work out hard enough.

You should only expect to be sore for the first few days of any new workout routine. If you exercise consistently and you still feel sore, it’s time to rest.

Myth 6: Women who lift weights regularly will develop big, bulky muscles.

“Strength training is a critical component of weight loss and management,” said Gregory Florez, CEO of Fitadvisor.com in Salt Lake City and spokesperson for the San Diego-based American Council on Exercise. “It is extremely hard for females to gain muscle unless they have high testosterone levels,” he said.

Myth 7: If you drink water while exercising, you’ll get cramps.

Drinking fluids while exercising does not hamper your performance. But losing an excess amount of water while working out can result in exhaustion, muscle cramps and loss of coordination.

Myth 8: Sweating gets you in shape.

The basic rule of working out and staying healthy is to avoid excessive sweating whenever possible. If you are exhausted, rest. You may be in danger of heat stroke.

Myth 9: Extra protein makes you strong.

“The only way eating extra protein will make you strong is if it is included with a high-intensity strength-training program like that of bodybuilders. Most regular folks don’t need extra protein to increase their strength; they get enough in their everyday diets,” Florez said.



Myth 10: Diet sodas are acceptable replacements for water.

"Diet sodas are absolutely not a replacement for water. The caffeine alone acts as a diuretic and can provide gastric upset," Florez explained. Diet soda can strip the body of much-needed nutrients and actually cause it to lose water.

Myth 11: Abdominal exercises will flatten your stomach.

Abdominal exercises, such as sit-ups or crunches, are important for strengthening muscles and improving posture. But if you have excess fat in your abdomen, you won't be able to see the muscles, no matter how many crunches you do.

Remember to always consult your doctor before beginning any exercise regimen.

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