



EXERCISE MYTHS:

separating the fact from the fiction

At some time or another you will probably come across the following myths during your exercise journey. Here's what you need to know to separate the fact from the fiction.

FICTION: STRENGTH TRAINING WILL MAKE WOMEN TOO MUSCULAR

Fact: Many women are afraid that strength training will make them bulky. However, women don't actually have enough testosterone to create big, bulky muscles. In fact, they naturally have less bone and muscle than men, which explains why females are at greater risk of developing osteoporosis than males. The fact is, women *should* undertake strength training because by keeping their bones and muscles strong, they decrease their risk of disability as they age.

FICTION: LIGHT WEIGHTS ON YOUR ARMS OR LEGS CAN BOOST YOUR EXERCISE BENEFIT

Fact: Some people carry light handheld weights when they walk or run, while others strap velcro-fastened weights around their ankles. Unfortunately, these sorts of weights are not heavy enough to provide the benefits of strength training, but instead will slow your training down, can alter your natural gait and therefore decrease the overall benefits received from the activity.

FICTION: CERTAIN EXERCISES WILL RID US OF TROUBLE SPOTS

Fact: Some people believe that if they exercise one particular area, it will cause fat to be removed from that area. In the gym you often find men who store their fat in their abdomen, are on the ab machines, and the women with larger thighs are on the hip machines for hours in hopes of 'spot reducing'. However, while these abdominal and hip exercises can strengthen and tone the muscles of those regions, those muscles are actually located underneath the 'subcutaneous' (deep) layer of fat; this means, we must lose the excess fat that is covering up the muscles in order to discard that 'flabby' appearance. When you exercise, the areas where you will lose weight is determined by your genes.

FICTION: IF YOU DON'T LOSE WEIGHT, THERE'S NO POINT IN EXERCISING

Fact: It's not uncommon for people who don't see immediate weight loss to consider giving up on their exercise routine. What we need to remember is that exercise gives us benefits that we mightn't be able to see so obviously. By exercising we reduce our risk of developing diabetes and heart disease, we reduce our triglycerides levels and

raise our HDL (good) cholesterol, and the psychological benefits have been proven to include both depression and anxiety relief. So even if weight loss is not occurring, remember that improvements occurring internally.

FICTION: YOU CAN'T BE FIT AND FAT

Fact: The notion that all fat people are sedentary and unfit and at high risk of developing health-related diseases is simply not true. Overweight and obese individuals who are fit, do not have elevated mortality rates. It has actually been shown that low fitness is as good a predictor of dying as other risk factors, like high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. Fitness is such an important predictor of mortality that it is essential to assess it as part of a person's general health risks and medical check ups.

FICTION: NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Fact: Many people still believe that you have to work at a very high intensity in order to get health benefits from exercise. In fact, moderate intensity exercise reduces your risk of dying just as much as high intensity exercise. Studies have found that women who regularly engaged in brisk walking reduced their risk of heart disease to the same degree as women who engaged in vigorous exercise.

FICTION: IF YOU STOP WORKING OUT, MUSCLE WILL TURN INTO FAT.

Fact: Muscle and fat are two distinct tissues that cannot be converted from one to the other. If you stop exercising your muscle tissue will shrink, which means you may feel flabbier. Also, when muscles get smaller they do not need as many calories to function, which means your metabolism slows down, so if you eat the same amount of calories, you may gain body fat.

By Liz Dene, BHMS

Liz is a personal trainer with more than 15 years industry experience. She specialises in nutrition and exercise and pregnancy issues and is a lecturer for the Australian Institute of Fitness (NSW) and presenter for Australian Fitness Network.