

[IMAGE]

Health and Fitness Myths

By Dr. David Ryan

It's an absolute madhouse of information coming at you on TV, the Internet, newspapers and magazines. So-called "fitness experts" seem to be everywhere, filling our heads with all kinds of information. Is it reliable? Not necessarily. Obviously we're not getting enough of the right information when it comes to nutrition and weight loss, since rates of obesity and weight-related diseases are skyrocketing. In fact, one-third of our children are now overweight. So either we're ignoring the truth or we're not getting it in the first place.

The first truth, albeit a regrettable one, when it comes to health and fitness is that if there is a dollar to be made, someone will step up to the plate and act as if they are an expert. That's why we're inundated with infomercials touting weight-loss products, fitness equipment and other products "guaranteed" to fulfill our health and fitness needs. But are the claims supported by fact?

I started learning for myself about health and fitness over four decades ago. Just like you, I wondered what worked and what didn't, and tried several "quick fixes" that never seemed to work out. Well, I have learned my lesson, and so can you. Take a walk with me and learn about what really works and what doesn't. It's time to bust some of the myths of health and fitness.

I. The Longer You Exercise, the Better Your Results

Health and Fitness Myths - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Many people think that the longer they exercise, the more weight they will lose. The reality is that in most cases, the more you exercise, the more you stimulate your body to burn fat. That's good, but it also increases production of a hormone called cortisol, which often causes your body to store more fat as fuel for the next time you work out. The key to optimizing weight loss is to exercise for approximately 45 minutes per session. If you want to exercise more during a day, that's OK, but divide up your workouts so you only work out for 45 minutes at a time. (For example, work out for 45 minutes in the morning and 45 minutes at night.) That is what the pros do to lose weight fast.

II. Eat Less Food = Lose More Weight

While in general this is true over time, many people think that if they essentially quit eating (eat only a few meals a day, or eat very little) they will lose weight. The body senses the lack of food, digestion slows down and the body holds on to fat. It's essentially the hibernation concept; good for bears, bad for you, particularly if you're trying to lose weight. To lose weight effectively, don't stop eating; eat smaller meals more often to optimize your metabolism. That way, your body will burn more fat instead of storing it; in fact, it will burn fat even when you're not exercising!

In terms of meal portions, use the size of your fist as a general guideline: one hand for protein, one hand for fruits/vegetables, etc. Try eating meals that can fit on a small tea cup saucer.

III. No Pain Means No Gain

If you live long enough, you are likely to experience some sort of condition that causes pain. When that happens, your first instinct is probably to avoid exercising; and you're not alone: Many people avoid exercising when they're in pain. Others take massive amounts of drugs to mask the symptoms and often do more harm than good, considering the known side effects of medications.

So, what's the general rule? If you have any pain that is sharp, stabbing, or causes numbness, talk to your doctor immediately. If you have pain that lasts longer than two days and is dull or aching, talk to your doctor. That said, most pain can be controlled while you exercise; if you keep the pain level below 50 percent of what you think is the worst pain possible, you are likely not hurting yourself.

That's important because most chronic conditions are made worse if you don't stimulate circulation in the affected area. For example, a major cause of chronic lower back pain is poor circulation; chiropractic manipulation and simple exercises help provide and restore normal function and circulation to the affected area. If you don't use it, you will lose it.

IV. Diet Pills Are Effective

They tell you that you can lose weight in just days by taking a diet pill. Let's look at how they work. Most are simple stimulants and result in elevated heart rates. Some also provide certain nutrients to stimulate the metabolism of fats, but here is the problem with providing chemicals to burn fat. The basic elements required to burn fat are a body temperature of 101 degrees internally, lots of oxygen, and various chemicals

to allow the process to occur. Heat and oxygen don't come from a pill. It is critical that you have all of these together or the key will not open the lock. Instead, your body simply breaks down the excess and you dump it all out through waste products. Now that is an expensive mistake considering the price of those pills.

So, if you don't exercise and sweat (the key here is sweating), then you are not going to benefit from taking a diet pill. If you do exercise, the pill, if taken as directed, usually has a miniscule impact on overall weight reduction.

A pilot study that looked at individuals who trained with aerobic exercise using diet pills and those using coffee as a stimulant showed less than 1 percent difference in total weight loss after six weeks. Remember, you also have the benefit that coffee is the most powerful antioxidant known to man. [See "Coffee: Berry, Berry Good for You" in this issue for more information.]

V. Ab Machines Make Your Stomach Smaller

Do abdominal machines make your stomach smaller? In short, no! I'm not knocking ab machines (although some work better than others), but the truth is the body stores fat in specific places. An abdominal machine will develop the abdominal muscles, but if you have a layer of fat on top, your waist size will stay about the same. The same is true about abdominal exercises - they tone and tighten the underlying muscles, but if you don't burn the fat, your waist won't get much smaller. On the other hand, if you do metabolism-elevating, fat-burning exercise regularly, combined with a low-fat, sensible diet, you'll see that fat layer shrink without doing a single crunch or sit-up.

VI. Organic Foods Are Superior to Non-Organic Foods

OK, yes and no. Many people have odd concepts about organic foods. People pay three times as much for an item that is stamped ORGANIC. Studies show there is no significant difference in taste, and the basic nutritional qualities are essentially the same if both foods are raw. The real differences are that non-organic foods have been exposed to pesticides and other chemicals, and that organic foods are higher in naturally occurring trace minerals, which allows your body to absorb the nutrients better. That means you can eat less food and stay healthy.

Oddly enough, however, most people eat the same amount of food whether it's organic or non-organic, and let's keep in mind that rule number-one when it comes to weight loss is calories in versus calories out! You also might be surprised to know that a considerable amount of organic food is imported, and there is little to

no regulation of that food. The best real organic food is grown by the Amish or in your own home garden.

VII. You Shouldn't Exercise During Pregnancy

Exercising while you are pregnant is a good thing, provided you follow some simple rules. The first rule is to never exercise longer than 45 minutes, of course; in this case, it's not so much about weight loss/gain, but because if you exercise longer, your blood sugar drops and gives the developing baby a similar condition. The second rule is to never maintain an exercise heart rate greater than 140 for longer than 10 minutes. You would be surprised how quickly your pulse can rise when you are pumping for two people. Get a heart monitor to wear on your body, one that alerts you if you go higher than a particular number of beats per minute.

Exercise is a great way to provide rich, oxygenated blood for your child and to help you maintain a healthy weight. Never gain more than 20-25 pounds, including baby weight, during your pregnancy. Your OB-GYN will tell you the same thing. Also keep in mind that exercise shouldn't start after conception. Your child's health is actually impacted by what you do six months prior to conception. So get in shape, eat right and offer your child the best chance for healthy development.

VIII. Exercising on an Empty Stomach Helps You Lose Weight

When to eat and what to eat around your workout is simple. If you are trying to lose weight, eat more carbohydrates and fats when you can burn them. Your meals should have more protein if you are not working out for a while. Your ratio of protein to carbs to fat should be about 40 percent to 55 percent to 5 percent two hours before and two hours after a workout; for other times, the ratio should switch to 55 percent protein, 40 percent carbs and 5 percent fat. It is also best to avoid eating 4-5 hours before you go to bed.

IX. You Don't Need to Be Afraid of Corn Syrup

So, is corn syrup safe? Well, the American Society of Nephrology's 42nd annual meeting featured a paper that suggests high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) has a direct effect on hypertension (high blood pressure). In addition, there seems to be a link between obesity and HFCS. A study from the University of Colorado Denver Health Sciences Center reviewed 4,528 adults with no history of hypertension who were given 74 grams of HFCS per day (about 2.5 soft drinks per day). In all cases, blood pressure increased, mostly due to weight gain. It is getting so bad that the University of Florida has proposed a "Fructose Index" to better

assess the risk of carbohydrates and their relationship to obesity.

The biggest problem is related to the way the body absorbs and stores the sugars from HFCS. Most sugars require insulin, but HFCS is passively absorbed as soon as it enters the digestive tract. If you are not burning energy at a high rate, your body instantly starts converting the HFCS to fat, by passing the liver in the fat production process. Table sugar (sucrose) is made up of glucose (normal blood sugar) and fructose; for years it has been the content of fructose that many experts have pointed to as a concern. So, in this case you should be afraid of a little corn. In fact, run away from it, keep your children away from it and use naturally occurring sweeteners instead. (This isn't an easy task, I know; next time you're in the grocery store, read some labels and see how many foods contain corn syrup / high-fructose corn syrup.)

Busting the Myths

When it comes to health and fitness, stick to the basics, use common sense, and keep it fun and simple. That's the most important advice I can give you. Too many people think it is too complicated to exercise or eat right. It's not unless you make it complicated. Eat a balanced diet, work up a good sweat when you exercise, and you'll do just fine. And remember, discuss your health and fitness goals with your doctor; they can help design the fitness program that's right for you - and help dispel more of the myths of health and fitness.

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