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12 Workout Myths That Just Need To Go Away

For every two fitness truths, there's a lie, and sometimes it's hard to determine which is which. (Especially when it's something many of us have just assumed for as long as we can remember.) So, now presenting: Mythbusters, Fitness Edition. Letting go of these 12 fitness misconceptions will help you get better, faster, stronger, and more powerful. Flex on friend, flex on.

Myth #1: Strength training will make you bulk up.

Truth: It's pretty hard for women to bulk up from a normal strength-training routine because they don't have as much testosterone as men (the difference in this hormone level makes men more prone to bulking up). In fact, if weight loss is your goal, strength training can actually help you lean out, but you have to keep your nutrition in check, too. "Muscle is metabolically active," explains Adam Rosante, C.S.C.S., author of *The 30-Second Body*. Simply maintaining lean muscle mass requires higher energy, he explains. "So, the more lean muscle you have, the more calories your body will burn at rest." #Science.



Myth #2: You can focus on losing fat from certain body parts.

Truth: Spot-training is not a thing. "Fat cells are distributed across your entire body," says Rosante. "If you want to lose fat from a specific spot, you need to lose overall body fat." High-intensity interval training can work wonders—after an intense workout, your body needs to take in oxygen at a higher rate to help it return to its natural resting state. This process requires the body to work harder, burning more calories in the process. Incorporating strength training can help you hit your goals too, since having more lean muscle will help your body burn more calories at rest. (Psst—here are 10 workouts that are insanely effective for weight loss.)

Myth #3: Doing lots of cardio is the best way to lose weight.

Truth: If your goal is weight loss, logging endless miles on the treadmill isn't always the best approach. Yes, traditional cardio workouts will help create a day-to-day calorie deficit (in addition to a healthy diet), which is essential for losing weight. But in the long-term, since having more lean muscle mass helps your body burn more calories at rest, you'll be adding to this deficit without doing a thing. A combination of both high-intensity cardio and strength training is a good idea. And don't forget, when it comes to weight loss, having a smart nutrition plan is key.

Myth #4: Not feeling sore means you didn't get a good workout.

Truth: While soreness and workout intensity are sometimes connected, how tired your muscles feel isn't always a good indicator of a solid sweat session. "Being sore doesn't necessarily mean it was a great workout—it just means that a significant amount of stress was applied to the tissue," says exercise physiologist and trainer Pete McCall, M.S., C.S.C.S., host of the *All About Fitness* podcast. "You can have a great workout and not be sore the next day," he says. Proper recovery will help prevent achy muscles. "Refuel within the first 30 to 45 minutes post-exercise, stay hydrated, and get enough sleep—all of these things can help boost recovery and minimize soreness."

Myth #5: You should give 100 percent effort during every workout.

Truth: Sort of. You should try your best to stay focused, be present, and give 100 percent during every workout. But not every gym session should require a balls-to-the-wall level of intensity. And if you are sore everyday, that may be a sign that you're going too hard. "It's not a good idea to exercise at too high of an intensity too frequently—it limits recovery and can lead to overtraining," says McCall. Ideally, to avoid putting too much stress on your body, you should only be going extra hard two to three times per week.

Myth #6: Strength training means using machines and heavy weights.

Truth: Strength training means using resistance to work your muscles—and that resistance doesn't necessarily have to come from a machine or a heavy weight. (Hello, killer bodyweight exercises!) Aside from your own bodyweight, you can also use tools like kettlebells, medicine balls, and resistance bands to add resistance. None of that around? Here are 13 incredible bodyweight moves you can do at home.

Myth #7: Sweating a ton means you worked your ass off.

Truth: Not necessarily. "You sweat because your core temperature increases," explains exercise physiologist Tracy Hafen, founder of Affirmative Fitness. Yes, your muscles create heat when you exercise so a tough workout will increase your internal temp, she explains, but it also has to do with the temperature you're working out in. "For example, you're not going to sweat as much in 40-degree weather as you would in 80-degree weather," Hafen explains.

The humidity in the air also plays a role. "It's not sweating that cools you off, it's the evaporation [of sweat]. You'll feel like you're sweating more when it's humid because sweat can't evaporate." (This is also a reason to be careful exercising in hot, humid climates, because your body temperature will keep increasing.)

Myth #8: Crunches are a great exercise for your abs.

Truth: Meh. Crunches probably aren't going to hurt your core strength, but they're not the most efficient exercise you can do to strengthen your midsection. "Your ab muscles are designed to work most effectively when you're standing upright," says McCall. Of course, there are plenty of great abs exercises that aren't completely upright (for example, this perfect plank), but these four standing abs moves will set your whole core on fire.

Myth #9: You have to do at least 20 minutes of cardio to make it worth your while.

Truth: You can get an amazing cardio workout in less time by utilizing high-intensity interval training. "High-intensity cardio challenges the respiratory system to work efficiently to deliver oxygen to working muscles," says McCall. "If the system is stressed hard enough, it doesn't require a lengthy workout for results." Plus, high-intensity training creates an afterburn effect, meaning you continue burning calories after you're done. One approach is Tabata, or 20 seconds of hard work, 10 seconds of rest for eight rounds total, which adds up to a four-minute routine. Here's what you need to know about Tabata.

Myth #10: You need to stretch before a workout.

Truth: While it's true that you shouldn't just jump right into a workout, dynamic warm-ups are where it's at—you can save those static stretches for afterwards. "Your pre-workout goal should be to improve mobility and elasticity in the muscles," says Rosante. This is best done with foam rolling and a dynamic warm-up, where you keep your body moving (instead of holding stretches still). This preps your body for work and helps increase your range of motion, which means you can get deeper into exercises (and strengthen more of those ~muscles~). Try this five-minute warm-up, or the warm-up section from this 30-minute workout.

Myth #11: Yoga isn't a "real" workout.

Truth: "People who write off yoga probably have an image of yoga as series of gentle stretches—they clearly haven't taken a tough yoga class," says Rosante. "The first time I took one was at Jivamukti Yoga Center, and was a radically humbling experience. It's been one of the best additions to my routine, both for my body and mind." While there are some blissfully relaxing yoga classes out there, tougher types (like Bikram and power Vinyasa yoga) can definitely leave you sweaty, sore, and satisfied. Can't make it to class? Here's a yoga-flow sequence for stronger abs you can do at home.

Myth #12: You should work out every day.

Truth: Definitely not true—hallelujah! When you work out, you're breaking down muscle fibers so they can rebuild stronger. However, to do this, you need to give your body time to recover from working out. Aim for one to two days per week of active recovery rest days—that means doing something that doesn't put stress on your body, like gentle stretching or a walk. So, you're definitely off the hook for that seven-days-a-week workout plan.

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