

Fighting fit and raring to go

Whether we want to slim down or tone up, it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction in the world of fitness where fads come and go. **Raquel de Brito** looks at whether there is any truth to some of the most common fitness theories



Myth 1: You can spot tone/fat reduce specific parts of your body.

Fact: As much as many of us would just like to work on a wobbly tummy or jiggly thighs, when it comes to exercise; it's near impossible to just make it work on one little bit of your body — every part gets the benefits. The most comprehensive study with the best measuring protocol suggested resistance training did not produce spot reduction. When we exercise, we generate an energy deficit by reducing food intake and increasing energy expenditure. While this does result in fat loss in different areas of the body, this loss is not determined by the body parts you specifically exercised. Spot toning/fat reduction generally depends on genetics and where the body stores fat.

Myth 2: Crunches will give you a flat tummy

Fact: Crunches may be great for strengthening abdominal muscles but if you're after washboard abs, sadly you're wasting your time with crunches

alone. In fact, crunches are a very ineffective way to lose fat mass because they don't require much energy expenditure. You may be

better off doing resistance training involving large muscle groups to increase overall muscle mass. Weight loss around the abdominal region depends on a variety of exercise, diet, as well as any history of abdominal surgery, pregnancy and other relative conditions.

Myth 3: More sweat = more calories burned

Fact: Sadly, the sweat you work up at the gym is not always equivalent to the calories burned or energy used. Your production of sweat can depend on a variety of issues, such as an inability to regulate heat, level of fitness, presence of chronic conditions, change of environment and presence of virus or illness. While sweat rate and rate of energy expenditure are both related to the intensity and duration of exercise,

there is no causative relationship between the two. If the environment is hot and humid in fact you may not be able

to burn as many calories during the workout because the body will be directing resources such as blood flow to the skin to try and cool the body. This means less blood and oxygen for the muscles, resulting in lower exercise intensity and

endurance.

Myth 4: Stretching before and after exercise does not reduce the risk of injury or help the body to recover faster

Fact: Think stretching before a workout is a waste of time? Think again. Several studies have found stretching before exercise reduces the risk of injury. Stretching after exercise provides a gradual transition from high intensity activity to rest and may enhance recovery. Dynamic stretching, such as skipping, side steps and high knees, is best used to prepare for exercise that will involve moderate to high intensity, while static stretching (holding a stretch) is best used at the end of your exercise. Research shows that there are mixed views in terms of whether stretching post exercise assists with maintaining muscle length or injury prevention.

Myth 5: Muscle weighs considerably more than fat

Fact: While it is true that muscle has a greater density than fat, don't be too quick to attribute



those extra kilos on the scale to your newly honed muscles. Muscle has

only a slightly higher density than fat and changes in muscle mass take time. When we start exercising, we tend to put those extra kilos down to an increase in muscle mass but this change in weight is usually fluid driven as changes in muscle mass usually take six to eight weeks of consistent exercise to manifest.

Myth 6: Eating fats will make you fat

Fact: Gaining body fat is the result of having an energy surplus over a period of time and has no relationship to whether the excess energy intake comes from fat or carbohydrate. Fat is a very important nutrient in our diets and weight gain from fat consumption usually comes down to quantity. We should stick to eating the fats that are good for us, such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, but even then, eating more than you require will lead to weight gain, which is true of any food group.

Myth 7: Lifting weights will make you bulky

Fact: Unless you are one of a very small number of individuals who are hyper-responders to exercise, then no, weights will not make you bulky. In this rare group of individuals, lifting weights can cause large changes in muscle hypertrophy but for the rest of us, it is actually a great way to lose body fat. Low weights with high repetitions can assist with toning and strength without increasing muscle size. Lifting weights drives hormonal release that increases metabolism and body composition changes towards lower fat levels and higher amounts of lean tissue.

Myth 8: Running is bad for your joints

Fact: Movement, including running, is actually beneficial for the joints. Being sedentary and overweight causes the majority of joint problems, such as osteoarthritis and



inflammatory conditions. People who run regularly actually have fewer joint problems than people who are sedentary. However, running, compared to walking, does put three times a person's body weight through their joints, so like any exercise, it is important people listen their bodies. If you have a history of injury ensure you consult an accredited exercise professional to ensure that running is the best form of exercise for you at that time.

Myth 9: Drinking extra water helps to flush out fat

Fact: While there are plenty of health benefits associated with drinking water, contributing to weight loss is unfortunately not one of them. The only way to lose body fat is to exercise more and eat less food that is high in calories. Drinking extra water only results in higher urine output and has absolutely no effect on fat tissue volume. But water will make you more hydrated, which is helpful because a lot of people tend to mistake dehydration for hunger.

Myth 10: Skipping meals speeds up metabolism

Fact: Passing up that tasty lunch in your quest to lose weight is not doing your metabolism any favours. Not only does your body go into conservation mode, skipping meals also often leads to overeating at the next meal or snacking more than usual. Additionally, low blood sugar from skipping meals leads to a feeling of sleepiness, resulting in less movement, which actually slows the metabolism.

These questions were answered with the help of Curtin University school of physiotherapy and exercise science associate professor Kevin Netto, Edith Cowan University medical and exercise sciences associate dean Rob Newton, Exercise and Sports Science Australia practice innovation adviser Beth Sheehan and Dietitians Association of Australia spokeswoman Margaret Hays.