

Debunking Exercise Myths

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Despite the abundance of information available to the public on exercise, it can be very difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction. Numerous publications, television programs and so-called “fitness experts” saturate the public with various fad diets and exercise programs that sometimes can be contradictory and further add to the confusion. Here are some responses to common questions and issues that fitness professionals are faced with on a daily basis:

I am a female who would like to begin strength training, but I am afraid of “bulking up.”

While it is a fact that most strength training programs will cause increases in muscle mass, females will not typically see large gains when compared to males. This is because females do not have the same amount of sex-specific anabolic (growth) hormones that directly lead to muscle growth. If you are still worried, stick to a program that consists of lighter weights and 12-15 repetitions per set. Just be sure that the resistance used causes significant fatigue in the muscle, and progressively increase the weight as it becomes easier.

Will I lose more weight by exercising in my “fat burning zone?”

Your body does utilize fat as an energy source during low-intensity exercise. However, studies show that the amount of CALORIES burned during exercise is directly related to weight loss, regardless of whether these calories come from fat or carbohydrate stores. These same studies showed that individuals burned significantly more calories during higher-intensity cardiovascular than those exercising at “fat-burning” or lower-intensities. Therefore, the goal of any cardiovascular exercise program should be to exercise at as high of an intensity as can be tolerated for an extended period of time (>30 min). If you are a beginner or physically unable to exercise at higher-intensities, be sure that you exercise for longer periods (45-60 min) to achieve sufficient calorie burn.

Will doing sit-ups or crunches help me lose the fat around mid-section?

No. Spot reduction, or the ability to lose fat in one area of the body by doing exercises for that particular area, does not exist. While doing abdominal exercise is important for improved posture and core strength, it is not efficient in burning fat. The most effective way to reduce body fat is to participate in a regular cardiovascular and resistance exercise program combined with a low-fat diet.

The above is intended as general information only. Be sure to contact your physician for advice or your own specific medical problems. Have a question? Write to Questions from the Field, Gananda-Walworth Physical Therapy and Village Fitness, PO Box 162, Macedon, NY 14502, or send e-mail to gwpt@villagefit.com.